Bengaluru Sunday, January 11, 2026 Pages 24 Vol 79 No 11 ₹8

DH on Sunday

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The Power of Good

Every conflict in world is born out of security concerns: Doval

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Sacred circuit

Kailash Mansarovar on your mind? Planning well in advance helps on the arduous yet uplifting journey

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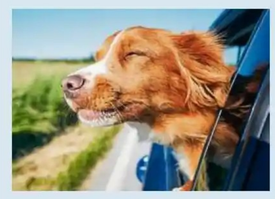

What pets teach us

Check out our new column on pets, pet parenting, and the life lessons that come on four legs

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In the spaces between

Author Rahul Pandita reflects on the difficult distance between life and fiction and the risks of speaking plainly

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Malvani platter

The Konkan region's spicy and aromatic food is a rich blend of flavours from Goa, Maharashtra and Karnataka

Quickly

Bengal cops probing ED over 'theft'

Police on Saturday started the process of identifying ED officials allegedly involved in the 'theft of documents' from the residence of I-PAC chief Pratik Jain and the consultancy firm office. Police are also trying to ascertain the ED personnel who were present at both locations.
Details on Page 3

Hate Speech Bill: CM, BJP to meet Guv

CM Siddaramaiah said Saturday he would meet Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot and convince him into approving the Hate Speech Bill while the Opposition BJP is planning to petition the Constitutional head of the state again to junk it. The Lok Bhavan has said the Bill is "under consideration".
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Green card: US judge to block Trump bid

A federal judge has said that she expects to temporarily block efforts by the Trump administration to end a programme that offered temporary legal protections for more than 10,000 family members of citizens and green card holders. US District Judge Indira Talwani said at a hearing that she planned to issue a temporary restraining order.

Eateries: Must service charges illegal

The Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution said on Saturday that the mandatory levy of service charge by restaurants violated consumer law. The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) said the automatic addition of service charges had been declared as an unfair trade practice, and that it invited penalties.
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Bombay not a Maha city: Annamalai

BJP leader K Annamalai sparked off a controversy in Mumbai when he said "Bombay is not a Maharashtra city but an international city," invoking sharp reactions from the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) and other political outfits. Annamalai was campaigning for the BMC elections in Dharavi.

India's startups: Navigating boom, hype and reality

A decade of rapid startup growth has created unicorns, fuelled AI innovation and exposed the challenges shaping the country's entrepreneurial future

DH illustration by **Deepak Harichandan**

GYANENDRA KESHRI
NEW DELHI, DHNS

In 2017, Masayoshi Son, CEO of Japanese conglomerate SoftBank, offered to invest $1 billion in Paytm. He raised that offer to $1.6 billion within a few minutes of conversation with Paytm founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma. Sharma disclosed this at an event organised by industry body PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 2023. "I was thinking if I get $100-200 million it would be good; $500 million would be great... Masa (Masayoshi Son) said, 'I want to invest a billion dollars in your company'," Sharma said, recalling his meeting with investors while raising funds to expand the digital payment platform he founded in 2010.

As Sharma was still processing the far better-than-expected billion-dollar investment proposal, he said that the SoftBank chief went on to sweeten the offer further.

SoftBank later announced a $1.4 billion investment in Paytm's parent company One97 Communications, raising the valuation of the company to $7 billion. Just months earlier, in August 2016, chipmaker MediaTek had invested $60 million at a valuation of $5 billion. In less than a year, Paytm's valuation rose by over 40%. Paytm went public in 2021 with a valuation of nearly $20 billion.

Like Paytm, several startups witnessed an exponential rise in valuations between 2010 and 2020, driven largely by the e-commerce and fintech sectors. Many companies that started business in early 2010s had turned unicorns — achieving valuation of over $1 billion — by 2020.

Annual funding raised by tech-dominated startups jumped from about $550 million in 2010 to nearly $15 billion by 2019, according to data analysed by startup intelligence platform Tracxn.

Big-ticket funding for late-stage startups has dried up in the post-Covid period. Startup funding fell from around $20 billion in 2021 to $4.2 billion in 2024. The median deal size dropped from $245 million in 2021 to $76 million in 2024. It declined further in 2025, falling to $32 million in the first half of the year.

The success of ChatGPT, which was launched by OpenAI in November 2022, has boosted artificial intelligence (AI)-powered startups, making AI the latest buzzword reshaping the tech ecosystem. However, venture capital and marquee investors don't seem to be enthused by the hype.

Sumeet Hemkar, a partner at Deloitte India, a leading global consulting firm, said investors have become more cautious and are investing only when convinced of the real value of businesses.

"There is a marked difference on how investors are evaluating businesses. Look at what happened to Byju's. They attracted large investments and their valuation skyrocketed and suddenly it turned out to be that there are actually not so many subscriptions or value of curriculum," said Hemkar.

Byju's, founded in 2011 as Think and Learn Pvt Ltd, became India's first edtech unicorn in 2018. Its learning app was launched in 2015 and the pandemic-fuelled demand turned its founder Byju Raveendran into a poster boy of India's startup ecosystem.

▸ Startup scenario, Page 2

INSIGHT

Beneath the facade: How governance fails the Fifth Schedule

ANAND TELTUMBDE

At first glance, the expansion of welfare schemes, roads, schools and hospitals in India's Fifth Schedule areas suggests progress. States such as Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh routinely point to investments in health, education, housing and infrastructure targeted at Adivasi populations. Non-governmental organisations, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and state-backed development agencies are visible on the ground. On the surface, the constitutional promise of protection for Scheduled Tribes appears to be bearing fruit. Yet beneath this façade lies a deeper governance crisis: decades of institutional expansion has not translated into meaningful self-rule or autonomy. Tribal communities remain politically and administratively marginalised, especially in decisions concerning land, forests and minerals.

The Fifth Schedule of the Constitution was intended to recognise the distinctive conditions of Scheduled Areas and safeguard tribal interests. It provides for Tribes Advisory Councils (TACs), vests special responsibilities in Governors, and establishes procedural protections against land alienation. Over the decades, these mechanisms have expanded in form, and welfare schemes have multiplied. But this institutional proliferation has not altered the underlying logic of governance. TACs remain advisory bodies without binding authority; Governors rarely act independently of elected state governments; and final control over development projects, resource allocation and lawmaking rests firmly with the state.

A tribal woman with her child waits for ration at Dantewada. AFP FILE PHOTO

The **SUNDAY STORY**

Consultation is mandatory, consent is not. Tribal objections to mining, dams or industrial corridors can — and routinely do — get overridden. In practice, the Fifth Schedule has delivered administrative management rather than self-governance.

This gap between constitutional promise and lived reality is not accidental. Jaipal Singh Munda, the principal Adivasi voice in the Constituent Assembly, warned that the Fifth Schedule had been "emasculated" through negotiations that confined tribal institutions to advisory roles. The design ensured that the closest bodies to tribal self-rule lacked decisive power, leaving authority concentrated with the state. Judicial interpretation has reinforced this marginalisation. In *Jilubhai Nanbhai Khachar v State of Gujarat* (1995), the Supreme Court upheld compulsory acquisition of tribal land, treating property in Scheduled Areas as a statutory entitlement rather than the basis of collective tribal sovereignty. Courts have consistently subordinated tribal rights to development imperatives, administrative convenience and state sovereignty.

▸ The Fifth Schedule, Page 2

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New investing paradigms

Startup scenario, from Page 1

The company's valuation peaked at $22 billion in 2022. By June 2023, however, Byju's defaulted on loan repayment and the company is now mired in lawsuits and insolvency proceedings, with its valuation effectively dropping to near zero.

Hemkar said the Byju's fiasco has forced the entire business ecosystem to think about what could be wrong in their portfolios. "Investors are now once bitten, twice shy. A lot of intelligence checks are happening. They want to make sure that what they are investing in is real," he added.

The total value of big-ticket startup deals ($100 million and above) declined to around $2.5 billion in 2025 from $3.7 billion the previous year, according to data sourced from Venture Intelligence, a market intelligence firm. In contrast, the collective value of mid-sized deals ($10-50 million) increased from $3.5 billion in 2024 to $3.8 billion in 2025.

Government push

The Union government launched the startup India initiative in 2016 with an aim to "nurture innovation and catalyse the growth of startups across the country". Nearly a decade later, about 1.8 lakh startups are recognised by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT). India has emerged as the world's third-largest startup ecosystem, with Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Delhi-NCR serving as the major hubs.

According to Tracxn, the total number of startups in the country stands at over 6.18 lakh. Of these, around 33,000 are funded companies that have collectively raised about $627 billion in venture capital and private equity. India is home to as many as 90 unicorns.

Over the past five years, 61,269 new companies have been founded, raising more than $8.78 billion in funding. Startups in India have witnessed 5,001 acquisitions and 5,441 IPOs, while about 1.06 lakh startups have shut down operations.

AI ecosystem

AI has emerged as a key focus for startups in recent years. Nearly 89% of new startups launched in 2024 incorporated AI in their products or services, according to a report released by the PIB Research unit. Leading sectors in AI adoption include industrial and automotive, consumer goods and retail, banking, financial services and insurance and healthcare. Together, they account for around 60% of AI's total value.

India ranks third globally in AI competitiveness, according to Stanford University's 2025 Global AI Vibrancy Tool, a report that assessed AI growth and innovation between 2017 and 2024. The report mentions that India has the highest number of active users of AI apps like ChatGPT, Gemini and Perplexity.

"India's AI ecosystem is moving from promise to performance, driven by initiatives like the IndiaAI Mission, large investments in cloud and digital infrastructure, and a vibrant developer community building solutions that meet global standards," said CP Gurnani, co-founder and vice chairman, AIonOS, an AI innovation company, and former CEO of Tech Mahindra.

Global boom

The global AI market is projected to soar from $189 billion in 2023 to $4.8 trillion by 2033, a nearly 25-fold increase in just a decade, according to a UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report. AI is expected to emerge as a dominant force in the global frontier technology market, with its share rising from 7% in 2023 to 29% in 2033. The value of the frontier technology market that includes the internet of things, blockchain, electric Vehicles, solar photovoltaic, AI and others was estimated at $2.5 trillion in 2023. It is projected to jump to $16.4 trillion by 2033.

To capitalise on this boom, investors have poured hundreds of billions of dollars into AI infrastructure and related businesses.

According to a Stanford University report, global corporate AI investment reached $252.3 billion in 2024, with private investment rising by 44.5% and mergers and acquisitions increasing by 12.1% from the previous year.

Companies' capital spending on AI is estimated to rise to $527 billion in 2026, according to a Goldman Sachs Research report.

US-based companies like Microsoft, Alphabet (Google), Amazon, Meta (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp), Nvidia and IBM dominate AI investments. These American firms exercise significant control over AI infrastructure and are poised to reap maximum benefits.

UNCTAD has flagged widening global divides in AI development. In 2022, just 100 companies – mainly in the United States and China – accounted for 40% of global AI research and development (R&D). Together, the two countries hold 60% of all AI patents and produce about a third of global AI publications.

The United States received around 80% of the global AI funding in 2025. Cumulative private-sector investment in the US from 2013 to 2024 stood at $471 billion, China ranked a distant second with $119 billion.

India lags behind

India lags far behind in investments in AI infrastructure. According to the UNCTAD report, India ranked 10th globally in attracting private investments in AI. In 2023, total private investment in AI in India stood at $1.4 billion, compared with $67 billion in the United States and $7.8 billion in China.

In March 2024, the Union government launched IndiaAI Mission with a five-year budgetary outlay of Rs 10,372 crore ($1.25 billion).

The allocation appears modest when compared with the plans outlined by several other countries. China has announced a $100 billion investment in AI while Saudi Arabia has outlined a $100 billion investment plan to establish itself as a major player by 2030.

What 2026 holds

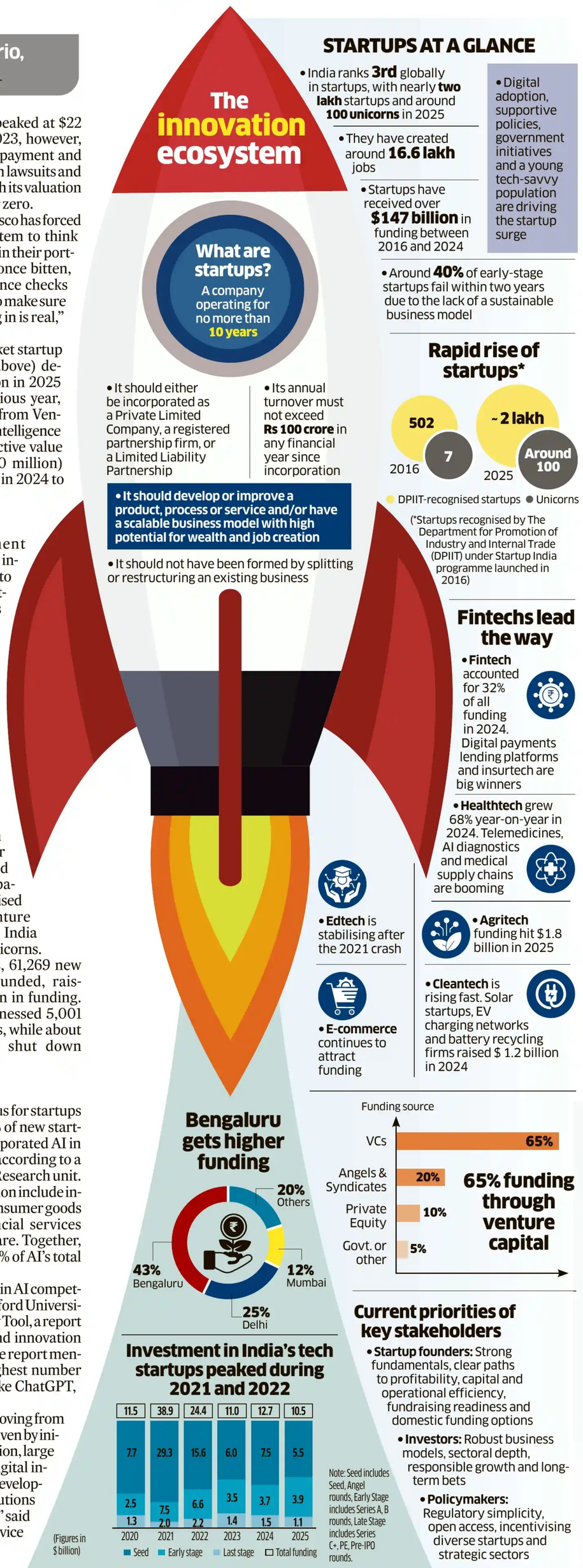
This year, India aims to launch indigenously developed foundational AI models, including Large Language Models (LLMs). It is expected to be launched at the AI Impact Summit, which is scheduled to be held in New Delhi from February 19 to 20. This will be the first global AI summit ever hosted in the Global South.

"Sovereign AI will move from a policy conversation to a hard requirement, as governments and enterprises demand ownership over data, models and inference. AI in 2026 will be coordinated, voice-first, and sovereign by design," said Ganesh Gopalan, Co-founder & CEO, Gnani.ai.

Apurv Agrawal, Co-Founder & CEO, Squadstack.ai, said the AI startup ecosystem in India would enter into a more mature and outcome-driven phase. "Investors are becoming far more discerning. Capital is flowing toward AI startups that are embedded directly into core business workflows, not sitting on the edge as assistive tools," said Agrawal.

Ankush Tiwari, Founder & CEO of pi-labs, said, in 2026, AI capital would shift from model-centric bets to platforms that unlock real economic value. "We expect strong investment momentum in AI middleware, infrastructure and security layers that enable accuracy, scalability and cost efficiency at enterprise scale," Tiwari said.

India's startup ecosystem is witnessing a significant reality check. Post-2022, the influx of venture capital has slowed. There is a marked shift in strategy from prioritising "growth at all costs" to a focus on profitability, sustainability and solid fundamentals. Investors are now looking for a clearer path to profitability rather than just promises and high valuations. It would be interesting to see if AI could give the much-needed push to the startup ecosystem.


The innovation ecosystem
What are startups?
A company operating for no more than 10 years
STARTUPS AT A GLANCE
• India ranks 3rd globally in startups, with nearly two lakh startups and around 100 unicorns in 2025
• They have created around 16.6 lakh jobs
• Startups have received over $147 billion in funding between 2016 and 2024
• Around 40% of early-stage startups fail within two years due to the lack of a sustainable business model
• Digital adoption, supportive policies, government initiatives and a young tech-savvy population are driving the startup surge
• It should either be incorporated as a Private Limited Company, a registered partnership firm, or a Limited Liability Partnership
• Its annual turnover must not exceed Rs 100 crore in any financial year since incorporation
• It should develop or improve a product, process or service and/or have a scalable business model with high potential for wealth and job creation
• It should not have been formed by splitting or restructuring an existing business
Rapid rise of startups*
502
7
2016
~ 2 lakh
Around 100
2025
DPIIT-recognised startups
Unicorns
(*Startups recognised by The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) under Startup India programme launched in 2016)
Fintechs lead the way
• Fintech accounted for 32% of all funding in 2024. Digital payments lending platforms and insurtech are big winners
• Healthtech grew 68% year-on-year in 2024. Telemedicines, AI diagnostics and medical supply chains are booming
• Edtech is stabilising after the 2021 crash
• Agritech funding hit $1.8 billion in 2025
• E-commerce continues to attract funding
• Cleantech is rising fast. Solar startups, EV charging networks and battery recycling firms raised $ 1.2 billion in 2024
Bengaluru gets higher funding
20% Others
43% Bengaluru
12% Mumbai
25% Delhi
Funding source
VCs 65%
Angels & Syndicates 20%
Private Equity 10%
Govt. or other 5%
65% funding through venture capital
Investment in India's tech startups peaked during 2021 and 2022
2020: 11.5 (7.7, 2.5, 1.3)
2021: 38.9 (29.3, 7.5, 2.0)
2022: 24.4 (15.6, 6.6, 2.2)
2023: 11.0 (6.0, 3.5, 1.4)
2024: 12.7 (7.5, 3.7, 1.5)
2025: 10.5 (5.5, 3.9, 1.1)
Seed
Early stage
Last stage
Total funding
(Figures in $ billion)
Note: Seed includes Seed, Angel rounds, Early Stage includes Series A, B rounds, Late Stage includes Series C+, PE, Pre-IPO rounds.
Current priorities of key stakeholders
• Startup founders: Strong fundamentals, clear paths to profitability, capital and operational efficiency, fundraising readiness and domestic funding options
• Investors: Robust business models, sectoral depth, responsible growth and long-term bets
• Policymakers: Regulatory simplicity, open access, incentivising diverse startups and strategic sectors
FROM SPEED TO STRATEGY
2010: Indian startups were in their infancy, concentrated in Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Delhi-NCR, with scarce venture capital, few angel investors and banks hesitated to lend without collateral
2014-16: India's digital infrastructure and startup policy matured, creating an ideal environment for innovation. In January 2016, the government launched the Startup India initiative
2016-21: Entrepreneurship surged with hundreds of new ventures registered, followed by record capital inflows as global funds prioritised India
2021-22: Startups, especially edtechs and healthtechs saw investments soaring to $42 billion, while unicorns raised $75 billion. Rising tech adoption, entrepreneurial interest, global investment and mega deals led the surge
2022: Despite Covid-induced uncertainty, startups raised $25 billion. They began facing a significant funding winter from late 2022, marked by local economic shifts and post-pandemic correction leading to cash burns, layoffs and high failure rates
2023: Funding reached over $10 billion, a 76% fall from 2021 peak and a seven-year decline due to global slowdown. Focus shifted on business fundamentals, profitability and sustainable growth
2024: Startup ecosystem showed recovery signs with ventures reworking on growth models. Funding exceeded $12 billion, up 20% from 2023
2025: A revival year for public listings, liquidity, and discipline, with startups raising $10.5 billion; early-stage funding rose 7% to $3.9 billion, reflecting confidence in scalable ventures

Source: Traxcn, ORF, Innovations capital, PIB, AP start hub, Grab on, INC 42, Funding Trends And Challenges For Indian Startups In 2025, Startup wired, media reports)

COMPILED BY DIVYASHRI MUDAKAVI DH GRAPHICS: GURU PRASATH R

'Shift towards profitability, not a funding winter'

In conversation with *DH*'s **Uma Kannan**, Accel India Founding Partner **Prashanth Prakash** discusses the startup funding landscape, highlighting robust early-stage funding in AI and deep tech, and noting that overall funding levels in 2026 are expected to remain similar to the previous year. Edited excerpts:

Startups raised only $10.79 billion in 2025, a 15% decline compared to 2024. What are the reasons for this slowdown?
There is definitely a lack of funding for Series B and C rounds that are upwards of $20-$50 million. But when it comes to early-stage, there is no scarcity across AI, deep tech and some consumer segments. There is sufficient capital for about $3-$8 million pre-series and series A rounds. Not just in India, but globally, there is a shift towards deep tech. IT-based technologies — whether it is for defence, space tech, advanced manufacturing, robotics, semiconductors or biotech — are seeing global demand. There is a lot of import substitution that can happen across these deep tech sectors. There is a really high-value market in India if companies are able to deliver products at a global level with both quality and competence.

Will non-AI sectors also receive funding in the coming days, as the focus shifts towards AI?
There are enough sectors for entrepreneurs to look at between AI/deep tech and consumer. There is still interest in the consumer sector. Capital will back companies that strengthen domestic supply chains.

Many startups went public in 2025, enabling several venture capital (VC) firms to successfully exit with huge profits. Will this continue in 2026? Are VCs prioritising profitability over growth?
IPO buoyancy is likely to remain similar to last year. There is a significant shift towards companies that are able to demonstrate the ability to get to Rs 50 crore - Rs 100 crore of Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortisation (EBITDA) within 7- 8 years of operation. Earlier, VCs were more comfortable trading growth for profitability, but now they are more moderate in their expectations of growth and with a stronger emphasis on achieving profitability by the seventh or eighth year.

During the Covid period, in 2021, startups raised a record equity funding of $38.93 billion. Do you think that will happen in the coming year, or will this funding winter continue?
We are unlikely to see that level of funding this year too. This year will be largely similar to last year. In my opinion, one should not position this as a funding winter. This is a kind of selective bias towards certain sectors and a shift towards profitability, a change in investing paradigm and sector of preference, rather than positioning this as a funding winter.

Given the current market scenario, what should founders focus on?
Founders should pick sectors around products that are anchored in some novel technology, IP and engineering so that it will be difficult for somebody to replicate those products. The focus should be to build something foundational, making their company irreplaceable in a larger system, rather than optimising for speed or surface-level differentiation.

Protected on paper, dispossessed in practice

The Fifth Schedule, from Page 1

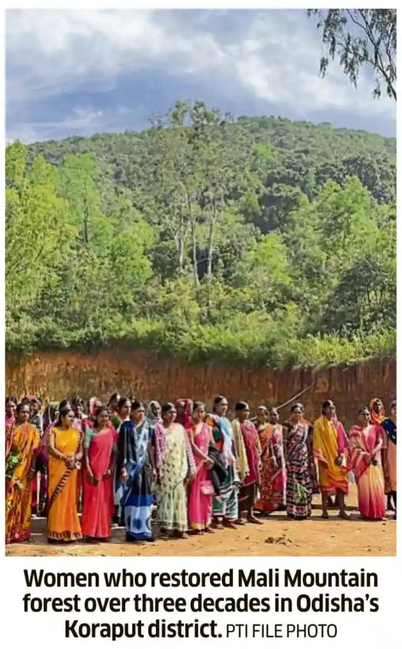
Even seemingly progressive judgments have proved fragile. The court's decision in *Samatha v State of Andhra Pradesh* (1997) momentarily recognised the inalienability of tribal land and restricted mining leases in Scheduled Areas. Yet its scope was later narrowed, and its spirit circumvented through state-owned corporations and legislative manoeuvres. The net effect has been to preserve the appearance of constitutional protection while steadily enabling dispossession through legal and bureaucratic means.

This constitutional and judicial architecture produces a paradox: the Fifth Schedule appears protective while functioning as a facilitator of extraction. Large-scale mining, dams, highways and industrial corridors routinely proceed in Scheduled Areas under the rubric of public purpose or national development. Monetary compensation may be offered, but it reduces dispossession to a transaction, ignoring the social, cultural and spiritual relationship between Adivasis and their territories. Collective claims over land and forests are fragmented into individual entitlements, and resistance is delegitimised as obstruction to development.

When communities resist, governance shifts rapidly from welfare to coercion. Operations such as Green Hunt in central India and the Salwa Judum in Chhattisgarh illustrate how tribal assertion of autonomy is recast as Maoist insurgency or internal security threat. Paramilitary deployment, mass displacement, and the criminalisation of activists, journalists and lawyers under laws like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) reveal how constitutional protections coexist with legal and extralegal mechanisms to suppress dissent. Communities invoking constitutional entitlements are rendered vulnerable to militarised occupation and prolonged incarceration, exposing the stark gap between formal rights and lived realities.

Marginalising local institutions

Governance failure in Fifth Schedule areas is not limited to dispossession; it also lies in the systematic marginalisation of local institutions. TACs meet irregularly, and their recommendations are frequently ignored. Budgetary priorities are set by line departments accountable upward to state bureaucracies rather than downward to tribal constituencies. The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act-enabled Gram Sabhas and Panchayats are reduced to procedural rituals. Participation exists, but it is procedural rather than substantive. Representation in elected bodies does not translate into real influence over development decisions, policing or resource allocation. Governance in these regions combines oversight and containment:



Women who restored Mali Mountain forest over three decades in Odisha's Koraput district. PTI FILE PHOTO

visible institutions channel welfare and maintain order, while substantive power remains concentrated with the state.

The growing role of non-state actors further complicates this landscape. NGOs, corporate entities, CSR arms and, at times, private security actors increasingly shape welfare delivery, political mobilisation and development narratives. In areas where state presence is uneven — strong in policing and extraction, weak in everyday justice — these actors fill the gaps. While some provide tangible services, their accountability flows upward to donors, corporations, or government departments, not downward to local communities. Development becomes charity rather than entitlement, and participation becomes compliance.

In mineral-rich districts such as Bastar or West Singhbhum, CSR initiatives often function as legitimacy devices, offering health camps or schools while neutralising resistance to extraction. Cultural and religious organisations also play a growing role, reshaping identities and political loyalties while displacing material questions of land and resource control. What emerges is a depoliticised form of inclusion: Adivasis are visible as beneficiaries, but invisible as decision-makers.

At the heart of this governance crisis lies the unresolved question of control over land, forests, and minerals. Fifth Schedule areas contain a substantial share of India's coal, iron ore, bauxite and forest cover — resources central to both national accumulation and tribal livelihoods. Yet, constitutional mechanisms convert collective territorial rights into administratively manageable procedures. Consultation substitutes for consent; compensation substitutes for autonomy. The Fifth Schedule proceduralises dispossession rather than preventing it.

Patterns of control

The post-insurgency landscape adds another layer of uncertainty. As armed movements recede in some regions, the state's administrative and security apparatus expands, filling the vacuum. In principle, this could deepen self-rule by extending accountability and governance. In practice, it often reproduces existing patterns of control. Roads built

In mineral-rich districts such as Bastar or West Singhbhum, CSR initiatives often function as legitimacy devices, offering health camps or schools while neutralising resistance to extraction

in the name of development double as corridors for extraction and security deployment. Surveillance expands, while political organising is tightly policed. Insurgency is replaced not by democratic autonomy but by bureaucratic and corporate domination.

Some analysts argue that this outcome reflects a structural flaw embedded in the Fifth Schedule itself, which was adopted from the colonial Government of India Act, 1935. By design, authority rests with Governors and state machinery, rendering tribal institutions largely symbolic. Judicial deference to executive discretion transforms constitutional protections into procedural formalities. Welfare and infrastructure function as a political smokescreen, masking the containment of tribal agency.

Fifth Schedule areas today stand at a crossroads. Governance could be reimagined by granting binding authority to tribal institutions, enforcing PESA in substance rather than form, and recognising consent — not merely consultation — in matters of land, forests and resources. Such a shift would require accountability not only of the state but also of non-state actors who increasingly shape these regions.

Absent such reforms, visible gains in welfare and infrastructure will remain illusory. They may improve services in the short term, but they cannot compensate for the structural disempowerment that leaves tribal communities marginalised in decision-making and vulnerable to dispossession. The constitutional promise of the Fifth Schedule will continue to function less as a guarantee of self-determination and more as an instrument of managed governance — development without power, inclusion without autonomy.

(Anand Teltumbde is an academic, scholar and human rights activist)

Bengal cops begin probe into document 'theft' by ED sleuths

To identify agency staff who raided I-PAC chief's office, home

KOLKATA, PTI

The West Bengal police on Saturday started the process of identifying ED officials allegedly involved in the 'theft of documents' from the residence of I-PAC chief Pratik Jain and the consultancy firm's Salt Lake office, a senior officer said.

The police are also trying to ascertain the Enforcement Department (ED) personnel who were present at both locations during the operations, the officer added.

On Saturday morning, officers from Shakespeare Sarani police station visited Jain's residence and collected CCTV camera footage and DVR recordings, he said.

"Statements of household staff and security personnel were also recorded. Once identification is complete, notices will be issued to the accused," he added.

TMC chairperson Mamata Banerjee on Friday lodged two police complaints against the ED in connection with the agency's raids at the office of I-PAC and Jain's residence.

Based on the complaints, Kolkata and Bidhannagar police filed FIRs and initiated investigations.

Mamata lodged her complaints against unknown ED officials and CRPF personnel at the Shakespeare Sarani police station, and against unknown ED sleuths at the Electronic Complex police station under Bidhannagar police station, in connection with the agency's raids at Jain's Loudon Street residence and his Salt Lake office, respectively, on Thursday.

▸ Bengal cops, Page 4

CBI AND ED TURNED INTO BJP AFFILIATED
ED
WHAT IS THE ROLE OF ED & CBI IN CHIT FUND EDUCATION DEPARTMENT CORRUPTION & COW TRADE?

Activists protest against the alleged misuse of central agencies in Kolkata on Saturday. PTI

ON THE TRAIL

- On Saturday, police officers visited I-PAC chief Pratik Jain's residence
- Investigators seeking CCTV camera footage of raid by ED officers
- Cases pertaining to criminal intimidation, theft and criminal trespass lodged
- Statements of household staff and security personnel were also recorded

Bengal govt files caveat in SC

The West Bengal government has filed a caveat in the Supreme Court seeking that no order should be passed without hearing it in connection with Enforcement Department raids against political consultancy firm I-PAC.

Iran's Guards declare 'red line' as unrest continues

DUBAI, REUTERS: Iran's Revolutionary Guards warned on Saturday that safeguarding security was a "red line" and the military vowed to protect public property, as the clerical establishment stepped up efforts to quell the most widespread protests in years.

The statements came after US President Donald Trump issued a new warning to Iran's leaders on Friday.

Unrest continued overnight. State media said a municipal building was set on fire in Karaj, west of Tehran, and blamed "rioters". TV broadcast of funerals of members of the security forces it said were killed in protests in the cities of Shiraz, Qom and Hamedan.

Details on Page 10

Hate Speech Bill: Guv under pressure from govt, Opposition

CM says he will try to convince Guv; Oppn to visit Lok Bhavan

BENGALURU, DHNS

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said Saturday he would meet Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot and convince him into approving the Hate Speech Bill while the BJP is planning to petition the Constitutional head of the state again to junk it.

The Bill proposes a jail term of one year, extendable up to seven, with a fine of Rs 50,000.

On Friday, the Lok Bhavan said in a statement that the Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill was "under consideration".

Of the 22 Bills passed during the Belagavi session of the legislature, Gehlot has approved 19 and returned two. The Hate Speech Bill is the only one on Gehlot's desk currently.

"Let's see. Let [Gehlot] examine the Bill. After he goes through the Bill, we'll meet him again and explain it to him," Siddaramaiah said.

The Opposition has described the Bill as "dangerous" and "draconian".

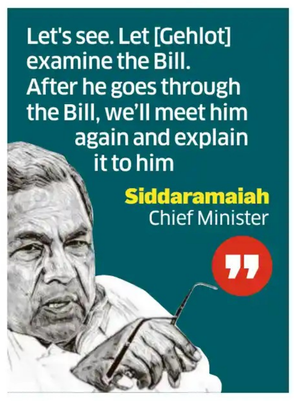
Gehlot has received petitions seeking rejection of the Bill from the Opposition BJP-JD(S) and Girish Bharadwaj of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

On Monday, Leader of the Opposition R Ashoka, BJP state president BY Vijayendra and others are slated to meet Gehlot.

Ashoka recounted the manner in which the Bill was passed in the Assembly. "The Congress government didn't allow a discussion on this. When I tried to discuss it, Congress MLAs and ministers got scared and hurriedly presented the Bill. The conduct of Speaker UT Khader also disappointed me," he said.

Ashoka said 15 BJP MLAs were prepared to speak on the Bill in the Assembly. "After discussion, we wanted to demand that the Bill be referred to a house committee," he said.

The Bill will "snatch" freedoms from citizens and media, Ashoka said. "Since the government isn't listening to our complaints, we're going to the Governor."


Let's see. Let [Gehlot] examine the Bill. After he goes through the Bill, we'll meet him again and explain it to him
Siddaramaiah
Chief Minister

'Hate Speech Bill draconian'

The Hate Speech Bill could be stalled by the Governor by declining assent or referring it to the President if it is repugnant to the existing central laws, former advocate-general BV Acharya said Saturday.

Details on Page 6

Pinarayi: Facts belie fears about Malayalam Bill

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PTI: Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Saturday said the apprehensions raised regarding the Malayalam Language Bill, 2025 do not reflect the facts.

His statement on social media platform X, comes a day after his counterpart in Karnataka, Siddaramaiah, wrote to him expressing serious concern over the bill. Siddaramaiah had stated that if the Bill was passed, Karnataka would oppose it by exercising every constitutional right available, in defence of linguistic minorities and the plural spirit of the country.

Details on Page 9

Siddu flags Karnataka's low conviction rate

BENGALURU, DHNS: Expressing concern over the lower convictions in Karnataka, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah promised on Saturday establishment of a prosecutors' academy to improve the conviction rate in the state.

Speaking at the inaugural session of the 17th state-level conference and training workshop for prosecutors, organised by the Department of Prosecution and Government Litigations, he spoke about Karnataka's standing in the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report. He noted that the state currently ranks 22nd in the country in terms of conviction rates, trailing significantly behind several other states.

According to the latest NCRB report, Karnataka ranks alongside Bihar and Rajasthan in the conviction rate.

Details on Page 5

1st India-NZ ODI: Kohli, Rohit are the cynosure

BENGALURU, DHNS: The spotlight will once again be on Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma as a full-strength India take on a slightly in-experienced New Zealand in the first match of the three-match ODI series at the Kotambi Stadium in Vadodara on Sunday.

The two Indian superstars have recently set the ODI stage afire, and have also piled on the runs in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy.

Another interesting aspect about the ODI series is how captain Shubman Gill will respond after being omitted from the T20 World Cup side.

Details on Page 12

EYE CARE

'Only 35-50% of donated eyes fit for transplants'

DH SPECIAL

SNEHA RAMESH
BENGALURU, DHNS

A mere 35%-50% of donated eyes are being used for transplant; the rest are unusable due to poor quality, according to hospitals and ophthalmologists in Bengaluru.

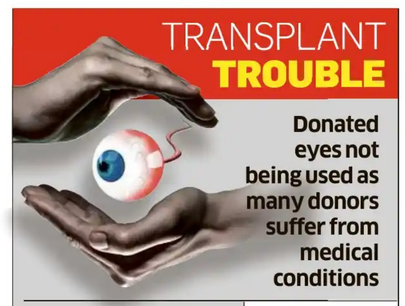
Donated eyes are not being used because many donors suffer from medical conditions that render the cornea unfit, they add.

"If the donor has had any medical conditions, the cornea cannot be utilised for transplantation. Among the major conditions are HIV, Hepatitis B and C, rabies, septicemia, leukaemia, syphilis and intraocular tumours. That apart, certain central nervous system infections like progressive multifocal leukaemic encephalopathy can also make the donated eyes unfit for a transplant," explained Dr Sangeetha Rao, Consultant (Opthalmology) at a well-known hospital in Yeshwantpur.

Ophthalmologists also said bad tissue handling during collection and transport could also render the eye unusable.

"Delays in collecting the eyes after death, especially in hot and humid parts of the country, are one of the reasons why donated eyes become unfit. How the eyes are handled and preserved during retrieval also makes a difference to whether they can finally be used. These are medical limitations, not a failure of donation," said Dr Sukanya Meikandasivam, Consultant (Ophthalmology) at a hospital in Kengeri.

▸ Transplants, Page 4


TRANSPLANT TROUBLE
Donated eyes not being used as many donors suffer from medical conditions
Bad tissue handling during collection and transport could also render the eye unusable
Many eye banks have now started short-term courses to train professionals in collecting donated eyes
Delays in collecting the eyes, especially in hot and humid places, are among the reasons why donated eyes become unfit

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ERODING AMENITIES CA sites are being misused in both govt and private layouts

In Bengaluru, when you buy a home, you lose a park

NAVEEN MENEZES
BENGALURU, DHNS

A decade after buying a 50×80 ft residential plot in Nisarga Layout at Jigani in southern Bengaluru, V L Bharath Raj discovered that the area had allegedly encroached upon land reserved for parks and civic amenities (CA), prompting him to move the High Court of Karnataka.

Nearly three years after the litigation began, Justice R Nataraj on October 15, 2025, ordered a four-member committee to investigate the formation of more than 1,000 residential sites on land allegedly reserved for civic amenities and parks in layouts developed by Nirman Shelters.

The court passed the order after taking note that the Kallubalu gram panchayat had issued 'A' khatas to the sites in question. It also vacated two interim stay orders, including one obtained by the developer against an investigation initiated by the Department of Panchayat Raj in September 2022.

Tip of the iceberg

Raj, who is in his 50s, believes the alleged misuse of CA sites is widespread across Bengaluru but has largely escaped public scrutiny.

"Diversion of CA sites is a massive scam. The land belongs to the government and is meant for the public, yet no official is interested in reclaiming it," he said, adding that the issue deserves as much attention as the Kogilu Layout encroachment case.

Under the Karnataka Town and Country Planning (KTCP) Act, 10% of the land in every layout must be reserved for parks and 5% for civic amenities. At the time of plan approval, the developer is required to relinquish this land to the government for public purposes such as playgrounds, schools, hospitals, community centres and public utilities. These amenities are considered critical for better liveability, an aspect that is rapidly deteriorating in Bengaluru.

The issue is not confined to private layouts. Misuse is rampant even in government-developed layouts, including those formed by the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA).

As many as 94 CA sites in Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Layout were illegally converted into residential plots. This was disclosed by Bengaluru Development Minister D K Shivakumar in response to a question by Rajajinagar MLA S Suresh Kumar in the Legislative Assembly in July 2023.

The violations are at such a scale that many neighbourhoods in and around the city do not have CA sites or playgrounds, let alone parks.

"Even revenue land (kharab) that could have been turned into an open space in urbanised areas is either usurped or sold," Thomas Varkey, a resident of Horamavu-Agara, said.

In February 2025, Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar visited private layouts to assess CA site violations and directed officials to ensure such misuse does not recur.

In many cases, residents remain unaware of the misuse of CA land because the layout plans of older colonies are not easily available in public domain. Raj points out that officials delay action even after judicial intervention, referring to his own case where the inquiry is yet to be initiated.

Another common irregularity is the frequent modification of layout plans, with CA sites repeatedly shifted from one location to another.

Aware of the mammoth scale of misuse, the deputy chief minister himself visited several private layouts in February last year to assess CA site violations. He also directed officials to ensure such misuse does not recur.

P Rajendra Cholan, Metropolitan Commissioner of the Bangalore Metropolitan Region Development Authority (BMRDA), believes the situation had improved since then.

"Following the deputy chief minister's visit, we were able to take possession of 2,200 CA sites, totalling about 900 acres, across 10 local planning authorities (LPAs). We have also registered khatas in BMRDA's name," he said.

According to him, the sites have been fenced, geo-tagged and uploaded on the authority's website.

He said a key reform had also been introduced in the approval process. "Earlier, developers merely showed CA sites on paper. Now, relinquishing CA land in BMRDA's name at the plan-approval stage is mandatory," he said, adding that developers are no longer permitted to split CA land to meet norms. "A CA site must be a single, contiguous parcel abutting a road. It cannot be fragmented," he said.

Activists, however, argue that enforcement remains inconsistent.

Vijay Dennis said the CA land in Begur's ITI Layout was allegedly encroached upon and converted into over 100 residential plots.

"The BDA inspected the site based on my complaint and acknowledged the illegality. It even wrote to the civic body seeking cancellation of the B khatas. Yet, no action has been taken for five years," he said.

In December 2021, the high court pulled up the BDA for failing to take possession of a CA site and park while approving a layout developed by the Vyalikaval House Building Co-operative Society.

A town-planning expert called for a comprehensive audit of all private and government-developed layouts in and around Bengaluru to assess the scale of CA site misuse.

"Such an audit must establish ownership and identify diversion. Once reclaimed, this land can be used to create essential public amenities," the expert said.

"Today, there is an acute shortage of land for sports, recreation and open spaces in Bengaluru. What is the point of owning a dream home if it is surrounded by concrete and commercial establishments and no breathing space for communities?"

Car jumps divider, smashes into restaurant wall in Indiranagar

BENGALURU, DHNS

Late-night drunk driving unleashed terror on Indiranagar's 100 Feet Road on Thursday, as a car jumped a divider and crashed into a restaurant wall, narrowly missing a group of pedestrians.

The incident, which occurred around 11.35 pm, left a 25-year-old motorcyclist injured and sent shockwaves through one of the city's busiest nightlife hubs. The Jeevan Beema Nagar traffic police have arrested the driver, Derrick Tony (42).

CCTV footage of the accident, which has since gone viral, shows the Skoda Slavia car hurtling at high speed from 18th Main towards 100 Feet Road. While attempting to negotiate a turn, Tony reportedly lost control of the steering. The vehicle mounted the median, crossed onto the opposite lane, and struck a two-wheeler before slamming into the exterior wall of the Barbeque Nation restaurant.

A group of diners standing just outside the restaurant entrance escaped death by a hair's breadth. "One moment we were talking, and the next, a car was flying toward us. We jumped back just in time," said a witness who was part of the group.

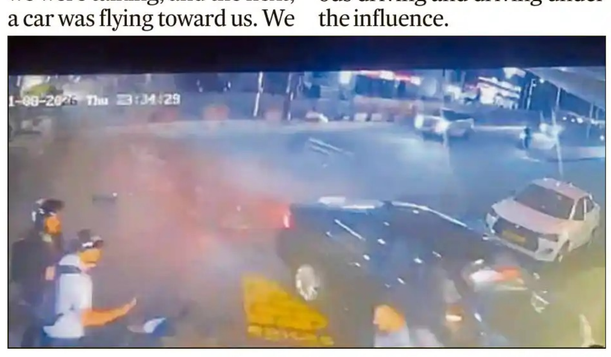
The motorcyclist, identified as Jabir Ahmed, was knocked off his vehicle by the impact. Passersby and local auto-rickshaw drivers rushed to his aid. Ahmed sustained minor injuries and was shifted to a nearby private hospital.

"He (the driver) came out of nowhere. The speed was so high that if the restaurant wall hadn't stopped the car, it would have ploughed through the entire footpath," said a rider who witnessed the crash.

Preliminary investigations and a breathalyser test confirmed that Tony was driving under the influence of alcohol. "The suspect was intoxicated and was driving well above the speed limit in a high-pedestrian zone," a senior traffic police official stated.

The impact was so severe that the car's airbags deployed, which saved Tony from serious injury.

The JB Nagar traffic police have booked him under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Motor Vehicles Act for dangerous driving and driving under the influence.



A video grab of the crash.

Biz dispute triggers counter-complaint of misbehaviour against restaurant chain owner

BENGALURU, DHNS: A financial dispute arising out of a failed business partnership allegedly led to a sexual harassment complaint against the owner of Narmada Chain of Restaurants, who is also associated with the popular Meghana Foods chain.

A 26-year-old woman, in her complaint to the HSR Layout police, alleged that the incident took place in November 2024 and she claimed that B A R Mohammed Ali (72) attempted to kiss her when she was alone after she went to his flat to discuss matters related to their business partnership.

The complainant has, however, not cited any reason for approaching the police more than a year after the alleged incident.

Police said the complaint was filed on January 7, 2026, after Ali had lodged a cheating case against the woman and her family members on December 26, 2026, making it a counter-complaint. Based on the FIR, police have summoned Ali to appear before the investigating officer to record his detailed statement.

Ali said he had assured the police of his full cooperation in the investigation.

Speaking to *DH*, he said he had filed a complaint against three women, including the complainant, alleging misuse of funds. "They misused the money without my knowledge and threatened me when I asked them to return it," he claimed.

He said the dispute was purely financial. "I invested substantial amounts, and personally bore all operational expenses such as rent, staff salaries and daily costs, while the other partners did not invest any money," he said. Ali further claimed that after suffering losses, he legally terminated the partnership from Narmada Chain of Restaurants, issued notices and started a separate business under a different entity.

"Despite this, they continued to operate delivery platform accounts and allegedly withdrew money that did not belong to them. I am owed nearly Rs 27 lakh towards rent and other dues," he said.

"When I initiated legal proceedings to recover the amount, a false complaint was filed against me as a counterblast. I am 72 and this is the first case registered against me in my entire life," Ali said, adding that he had engaged a senior criminal advocate. Ali also alleged that a middleman was sent to him, asking him to withdraw the case and not demand the money due to losses in the business. "She named the owner of Meghana Foods to damage my reputation since my son will handle the business now," Ali stated.

Five injured in LPG explosion in Peenya

BENGALURU, DHNS: Five construction workers have been severely injured in an explosion triggered by an LPG leakage in Peenya, north Bengaluru, police said. The injured have been identified as Anshuraj Chaudhary (18), Hussein Khan (21), Muzaffar Hussein (19), Arbaig Alam (26) and Rohit Chaudhary (20), all natives of Bihar and working in an under-construction site.

A senior police officer said that the incident occurred at 7.30 am on Friday at their rented house in Chokkasandra, where the workers were residing. They had bought a private LPG cylinder which leaked late night. One of them lit the stove to make tea, and an explosion occurred. All the injured were shifted to Victoria Hospital. They sustained burn injuries to their faces and hands, and their condition is stable, officials said.

The force of the explosion caused cracks in the walls, and household articles were scattered across the house, officials added.

Six researchers under 40 honoured with Infosys Prize 2025

BENGALURU, DHNS

The Infosys Science Foundation (ISF) felicitated the winners of the Infosys Prize 2025 at a ceremony on Saturday, honouring six researchers under the age of 40 for outstanding contributions across disciplines.

The Infosys Prize 2025 was announced in November.

The award in economics went to Nikhil Agarwal of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) for transforming the study of market design through data-driven approaches to matching problems such as school choice, medical residencies and kidney exchanges.

In engineering and computer science, Sushant Sachdeva of the University of Toronto was recognised for seminal contributions to algorithmic theory and mathematical optimisation that shape modern networks. The humanities and social sciences prize went to Andrew Ollett of the University of Chicago for his groundbreaking scholarship on Prakrit languages and Indian literary culture.

In life sciences, Anjana Badrinarayanan of NCBS, Bengaluru, was honoured for pioneering work on genome maintenance and DNA repair.

Nobel laureate Prof Randy Schekman (centre) with Infosys Prize 2025 winners (front row) and Infosys Science Foundation trustees (back row) in Bengaluru on Saturday. PHOTO/INFOSYS

The mathematical sciences award was conferred on Sabyasachi Mukherjee of Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Mumbai, for original work in complex dynamics, while physical sciences laureate Karthish Manthiram of California Institute of Technology (Caltech) was recognised for innovations in sustainable electrochemical manufacturing.

Each winner was presented with a gold medal, a citation, and a prize purse of USD 100,000 (approximately Rs 90.17 lakh) by chief guest Professor Randy Schekman, Nobel laureate in Physiology or Medicine (2013).

Trustees of the Infosys Science Foundation, including N R Narayana Murthy, Kris Gopalakrishnan, S D Shibulal, T V Mohandas Pai, Nandan Nilekani and Salil Parekh, were also present at the event.

Addressing the audience, K Dinesh, president of the ISF Board of Trustees, said the foundation was proud to recognise "emerging researchers whose work reflects the evolving strength and promise of science today".

He noted that the winners' achievements underscored the role of research in addressing complex global challenges and reaffirmed the foundation's belief that science is key to building a more sustainable and resilient world. Emphasising collaboration, Dinesh highlighted the continuation of the Infosys Prize Sabbatical programme, which invites laureates based outside India to spend a month at an Indian institution.

City's growth inevitable but its health consequences aren't: Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao

BENGALURU, DHNS: As Bengaluru grapples with rapid growth and mounting civic pressures, Health and Family Welfare Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao, senior policymakers and public health experts came together on Saturday to ask a fundamental question: Is the city enabling a healthy life for its residents?

Titled 'Does Bengaluru Offer Its Citizens a Healthy Life?', the conversation was a part of a quarterly dialogue series convened by the Bangalore International Centre (BIC) and Janaagraha.

The session examined how urban planning, infrastructure and governance shape public health outcomes in the city.

Rao said Bengaluru's growth was inevitable, but warned that its health consequences were not.

"Rising pollution, pressure on water systems, lifestyle stress and long hours in traffic are driving an alarming increase in non-communicable diseases and mental health challenges," he said, adding that strengthening urban public healthcare was now a governance priority.

The government, he noted, was expanding hospitals, upgrading facilities and rolling out urban primary care and early screening programmes to ensure early detection and prevention.

He was accompanied on the panel by Malleswaram MLA C N Ashwath Narayan; Shreelata Rao Seshadri, Professor and Director, Ramalingaswami Centre for Equity and Social Determinants of Health, Public Health Foundation of India; and Nachiket Mor, Economist and Health Systems Researcher.

The discussion was moderated by Srikanth Viswanathan, CEO, Janaagraha.

Ashwath Narayan noted that while Bengaluru had made strides in healthcare innovation, prevention remained neglected.

The panel highlighted how issues such as air quality, water supply, housing, mobility and access to public spaces are often treated as isolated civic problems, even though they are key determinants of health. The fragmented nature of governance across multiple agencies, they said, makes coordinated and preventive action difficult.

"Most aspects of urban health can be fixed through better planning, infrastructure and service delivery," said Viswanathan, calling for public health to be treated as a cross-cutting priority as the city restructures its governance framework.

Panelists share their views on how urban planning, infrastructure and governance shape public health outcomes in Bengaluru on Saturday. DH PHOTO/B K JANARDHAN

GENOME BREAKTHROUGHS

Nobel laureate hails Bengaluru's rise in biological research

ASRA MAVAD
BENGALURU, DHNS

Randy Schekman

Acclaimed biologist and Nobel laureate (2013) Randy Schekman hailed Bengaluru for heading in the right direction in biological research, and urged more government and philanthropic support in the area.

"Bengaluru has probably the best biological research centre in the country — the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), which I'll be visiting on Monday. You need more places like that. You need government and philanthropic support for places like that, where the best young Indian scientists can come and work independently," he told *DH*.

He also urged young scientists not to give in to the pressure of getting published in "high-profile journals".

"This is a concern worldwide. These high-profile journals are controlled by professional editors, who I feel, unfortunately, are in the business of selling magazines. They're looking for the next shiny object, which is why I've decided to publish only in journals run by academics or scientists, where commercial interests aren't the main concern," he added. In his speech at the Infosys Prize 2025 felicitation ceremony on Saturday, Professor Schekman traced the arc of modern molecular biology, from the discovery of DNA's structure to cutting-edge genome editing, while also highlighting the growing global challenge of neurodegenerative diseases, particularly Parkinson's.

Turning to a more urgent concern, Schekman warned that Parkinson's disease is rising faster than Alzheimer's worldwide, likely driven by environmental factors as well as genetics.

Drawing on his personal experience caring for his late wife, who had Parkinson's, he emphasised the lack of effective therapies. He described his involvement in a large, collaborative global research effort, backed by philanthropist Sergey Brin, aimed at advancing fundamental understanding of the disease through team-based science.

"When I walk away from this programme in five years, I will leave behind, with some confidence, breakthroughs that will make a difference in the lives of those affected by Parkinson's," he said, concluding his speech.

Prior to the event, Schekman also interacted with 80 high school and university students, answering questions about science and research.

Precise correction

Nobel laureate Randy Schekman pointed to recent breakthroughs in genome editing, especially CRISPR-Cas9 technology pioneered by researchers, including his colleague Jennifer Doudna.

He described how this RNA-guided system allows precise correction of disease-causing mutations, citing successful treatments for sickle cell anaemia and a recent case in which a fatal metabolic disorder was cured in an infant. These advances, he said, signal unprecedented possibilities for treating inherited diseases.

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The maiden trial run on Friday night. PHOTO/BMRCL

Trial run begins on metro Pink Line's elevated section

BENGALURU, DHNS: Namma Metro has begun mainline trial runs of the Pink Line prototype on the 7.5-km elevated section between Kalena Agrahara and Tavarekere.

The six-coach train, delivered by BEML Ltd on December 11, 2025, made its maiden journey on the tracks on Friday. Officials from the BMRCL, BEML and subsystem aggregate suppliers were present on the occasion, a senior BMRCL official said. In a statement, the BMRCL said rolling stock type tests on the Kalena Agrahara-Tavarekere corridor would begin on Sunday and be completed by mid-April.

A rolling stock type test evaluates a new train and its components for safety, performance and compliance with regulations before it enters service.

"This mainline testing is a vital activity involving comprehensive validation of train performance and system integration under actual field conditions to obtain statutory approvals. During the above-mentioned period, traction and brake type tests, oscillation trials at various speeds, integration tests with signalling, and power and telecommunication systems, among others, will be conducted," the BMRCL added.

The BMRCL plans to open the Pink Line's elevated corridor by May.

Bhumika Club blends inspiration, skills and celebration

BENGALURU, DHNS

Bengaluru witnessed an evening of community, creativity and conversation as Bhumika Club hosted its 35th edition, marking its 15th event in the city.

The event, 'Gold Winner presents Bhumika Club,' brought together women, children, industry leaders, artistes, and brands for a packed programme celebrating inspiration, empowerment, and fun.

The event opened with a highlight of the platform's role in bringing together women from diverse backgrounds to interact, learn, and grow through meaningful social experiences.

Participants at the Bhumika Club's 35th edition in Bengaluru on Saturday. DH PHOTO/RANJU P

Activities planned through the day included a cookery contest, a high-energy Zumba session, live music performances, interactive games, and an inspiring session on 'Skill to Income' by Asha Biradar, president of the WICCI Leadership Coaching Council, Karnataka.

A key attraction was the Kids Fashion Show, with young participants walking the ramp across three age categories: 3–5, 6–10, and 11–15 years. Judges evaluated them on confidence, creativity and expression, selecting top winners in each group.

The event featured several distinguished guests, including Kiran Sundararajan, COO of TPML; Kusuma H, spokesperson of the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee; actress Shyam Kanwar; and representatives from Gold Winner, *DH*, Prajavani, and Kings Club Nagarabhavi, who spoke about community initiatives and women's empowerment.

Winners across competitions were also announced during the programme. The Gold Winner Little Star (3–5 years) title was won by Aarna, while Manmit and Disha J secured the Junior Style Star (6–10 years) and Teen Trendsetter (11–15 years) titles respectively. The cookery contest was won by Triveni, with Latha declared runner-up. The first lucky draw prize—a Rs 15,000 water purifier—was won by Sujatha Suresh, while Vimala J received two VVIP passes to the Prajavani Cine Sammaana Awards 2026.

Park timing curbs trigger public backlash

BENGALURU, DHNS

The Bengaluru South City Corporation's decision to change park timings has attracted outrage among residents. A letter campaign has now been initiated against the move.

In 2024, the then Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) had ordered that all parks should be open between 5 am and 10 pm.

But the South City Corporation recently stated that parks in its jurisdiction would be open only from 5 am to 11 am and 4 pm to 8 pm.

Citizens feel the truncated timings make parks inaccessible.

An X user, @blueringtail, urged citizens to write to Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) Chief Commissioner M Maheshwar Rao and the South City Corporation commissioner to review the decision.

Detailing the various categories of people who would be impacted by the decision, he expressed concerns that other corporations would follow suit if it was not opposed now.

The South City Corporation recently stated that parks in its jurisdiction would be open only from 5 am to 11 am and 4 pm to 8 pm.

From college students to software employees to household helps and cab drivers, different people visit parks at different times, and they should be open for longer hours, citizens opined.

"The examples above are real examples of real tax-paying citizens who face the brunt of not having open access to their open spaces every day.

With the new park timings, the parks in South Bengaluru are open for a mere 6 hours in the morning and 4 hours in the evening. These are timings suited to just one section of society," a post on X said.

South City Corporation Commissioner K N Ramesh said he was ready to review the decision if there is public demand for it.

"We decided to change the timings only after the public requested it. A number of RWAs, local representatives and citizens approached us requesting a change. Public interest is always our priority. If there is public demand that the parks have to remain open longer, we will consider that as well," he said.

He noted that most parks had few visitors during the afternoon hours and the decision was taken to curb illegal activities.

"We also need to take up maintenance works. We have also seen the statistics: hardly anyone visits the parks in the afternoon hours," he added.

Youth roams with gun after love rejection

BENGALURU, DHNS: Panic gripped Mallapura village in Nelamangala taluk on Saturday after a youth was seen roaming with a gun in broad daylight, allegedly after being rejected in a love affair.

Police said the accused, Kumar, a native of Bihar, was allegedly searching for the woman who had turned down his advances. Sensing imminent danger, passersby showed presence of mind and dialled the emergency helpline 112, police said.

Acting swiftly on the alert, Nelamangala Rural police rushed to the spot and took the man into custody along with the firearm. CCTV footage capturing the accused walking around the village with the gun has since surfaced and is part of the investigation. Police said he was seen holding the weapon behind his back. A case has been registered at the Nelamangala Rural police station.

City gets light showers but minimum temperature rises

BENGALURU, DHNS: Some parts of Bengaluru received light rainfall late on Saturday afternoon, while the minimum temperature stayed slightly above normal.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), trace rainfall was recorded at its Bengaluru city, HAL airport and Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) observatories.

Trace rainfall is defined as 0.01 cm to 0.49 cm.

Meanwhile, maximum and minimum temperatures have dipped at the city's three main weather stations operated by the IMD.

KIA, in the city's north, recorded a minimum temperature of 14.1°C at 8.30 am on Thursday, a 0.3°C drop from normal. Its maximum temperature was 23.7°C at 5.30 pm, down 3.9°C.

HAL airport, in the city's east, recorded a minimum temperature of 16.7°C at 8.30 am and a maximum temperature of 24.4°C at 5.30 pm, an increase of 1.6°C and a drop of 2°C, respectively.

The Bengaluru city observatory, located in the centre, recorded a maximum temperature of 23.7°C at 5.30 pm and a minimum of 17.2°C at 8.30 am, a dip of 4.1°C and an increase of 1.2°C, respectively.

The IMD has forecast a partly cloudy sky, with fog or mist likely during early morning hours in some areas on Sunday. The maximum and minimum temperatures will be around 26°C and 16°C, respectively.

Elsewhere in the state, cold wave conditions are forecast for Bidar, Kalaburagi, Vijayapura and Dharwad districts.

◆ IN THE CITY ◆

GENERAL

Homage to Prof Madhav Gadgil: B K Chandrashekhar, T V Ramachandra, Nagesh Hegde, Seshagiri Rao and K E Radhakrishna to be present; Parisaraskatha Balaga, Press Club of Bangalore, Cubbon Park; 11 am.

All India Inter-University Women's Badminton Championship: Jawahar Doreswamy, Ashwini Bhat and J Suryaprasad to be present: PES University RR Campus, Banashankari 3rd Phase; 9 am.

'Be Good Do Good' Walkathon: Vishwa Samvad Kendra: Cubbon Park; 7 am.

Free Health Checkup Camp: Dinesh Gundu Rao to inaugurate: Dr C N Manjunath and Uday B Garudachar to be present: Sri Subramaneshwara Co-operative Bank Limited: Chamaraja Kalyana Mantapa, Jayanagar; 9 am.

CULTURAL

Greatest Hindi Plays Atul Satya: Chakravyuha: Kaushik, Nitish Bharadwaj as Krishna; Seva Samiti Bangalore; Prestige Centre for Performing Arts, Kanakapura Road; 6 pm.

Margashirshotsava: Carnatic Classical Music Concert; Sudha Raghunathan and team; Surabharathi, HRBR Layout; 6.30 pm

Carnatic Music Concert: Singer: Rajarajeshwari Prakash; Department of Horticulture; Band Stand, Cubbon Park; 7 am

Remembering Kuvempu: Lata Mysore, Sunith Kumar Shetty to be present; Gandhi Bhavan, Kumara Krupa Road; 4.30 pm.

◆ CITY WEATHER ◆

FORECAST
Mist
TEMPERATURES

Maximum	23.7°C
Minimum	17.2°C
Rainfall (as of 8:30 am)	--
Humidity (as of 5:30 pm)	NA%
Sunset (Jan 11)	6:38 pm
Sunrise (Jan 12)	6:08 am
Moonrise	--:-- am
Moonset	12:00 pm

(Relevant data recorded at 5.30 pm) Source: IMD

TENDER NOTICE THE DEN

The Den Bengaluru, A unit of **DAN HOSPITALITY INDIA PVT LTD** invites quotations from established vendors to supply of the following items on an Annual Rate contract basis from **1st April 2026 - 31st March 2027.**

Vegetables, Local & Imported fruits, Exotic Vegetables, Mushrooms, Peeled, Sprouted items, Milk, Milk products, Fish, Sea food, Mutton, Beef, Pork, Eggs, Cold Cuts, Water, Charcoal, Fresh Flowers, Groceries, Provisions/Atta/Maida, Cashew nuts, Ice block/Ice cubes/ Dry ice, Scrap, Portable Water Tanker, Hiring of Audio Visual Equipment, Transport providers (staff drop, store van etc.), Banquet hiring - lighting, Tent Services/CGS items, Motor Rewinding, Debris Cleaning, Courier Service, Maintenance / Repair job work, Comprising civil, plumbing, sanitary, furniture, electrical, mechanical, air-conditioning etc.

The Tender forms can be collected between **10:00 AM- 5:00 PM** from **15th January 2026 - 31st January 2026**, from hotel's Materials office on payment of **Rs. 500/- Cash** (non-refundable). The filled form should be submitted in a sealed envelope on or before **05th February 2026 by 5:00 PM**. "All tenders to comply with the provisions of the new FSSAI Act". Preference to be given to farmers/ manufacturers/ vendors with ISO 22000/14000 certifications.

Contact: 080-71117316
E-mail: mmr.blr@denhotels.com & apm.blr@denhotels.com
Dated: 11th Jan 2026

*We, The Management of Dan Hospitality India Pvt Ltd. Reserve rights to accept / reject any tender. ITPL Main Road, Bangalore-560066

SOUTHERN RAILWAY

Chennai Division — Mechanical Branch

Tender No.: MMW271AdditionalFuel Dated: 08.01.2026

Divisional Railway Manager / Mechanical Branch / Chennai Division, Chennai–600 003 for and on behalf of the President of India invites ONLINE tenders for the following work as per tender notice given in the e-tender Portal **www.ireps.gov.in.**
The tenderer(s) / contractor(s) intending to apply for e-tender for Mechanical works in Chennai division, need to get enrolled in the e-tender portal **www.ireps.gov.in** and only online tenders will be accepted.

Description: Outsourcing of "Supply, installation & commissioning of fuel pipelines for Additional Fuelling Points in BBQ Yard".

Location	Basin Bridge
Advertised tender value in (Rs)	68,84,568.00
Earnest Money Deposit in (Rs)	1,37,700.00
Similar nature of work	Applicable
Period of completion in days	60 days

Tender closing date and time: **30.01.2026 @ 15:00 hrs**
Details of value of tender, EMD are given in e-portal **www.ireps.gov.in.**
For details of bid submission please refer to web portal **www.ireps.gov.in.**

Divisional Railway Manager (Mechanical)
Chennai Division, Southern Railway, Chennai – 600 003.

SOUTHERN RAILWAY

Salem Division

E-Tender Notice No. SA-TRD-2025-26-155 dated 07.01.2026

Sr.Divisional Electrical Engineer/Traction and Distribution branch/ Salem Division, Salem - 5 for and on behalf of the President of India Invites ONLINE tenders for the following works as per tender notice given in our e-tender portal **www.ireps.gov.in**. The Tenderer(s)/Contractor(s) intending to apply for e-tender for works in Salem Division, need to get enrolled in the e-tender portal **www.ireps.gov.in** and only online tender will be accepted. It is the responsibility of Tenderer(s)/Contractor(s) to obtain Digital Signature certificates for participating e-tendering.

Sl. No.	Tender No. & Name of work	Appx. value of the work (in lakh)	Cost of tender form ₹	Amount of EMD (₹)	Completion period of work.
1	SA-TRD-2025-26-155-1 Electrical TRD arrangements for Salem Division- TRR(P) - 14.082 Tkm & TSR(P) - 18.45 Tkm	41.68	0	83400	12 months
2	SA-TRD-2025- 26-155-2 Modification to OHE in connection with removal of signalling constraints Coimbatore Junction	23.42	0	46900	06 months

Sl.No.1 & 2: Tender closing date and time: 04.02.2026 at 14.30 Hrs.
Complete details of the above tenders are given on the e-portal "**www.ireps.gov.in**".
For Details of bid submission, please refer website portal "**www.ireps.gov.in**".
The online bids for tenders floated through the above portal are required to be digitally signed.

Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer, Traction Distribution, Salem.

झारखण्ड राज्य बिवरेजेज कॉरपोरेशन लिमिटेड, राँची
(झारखण्ड सरकार का उपक्रम)
कॉर्पोरेट पहचान सं० -U51228JH2010SGC014519,
TIN No - 20520108277
E-mail :- jsbcl.jharkhand@gmail.com
उत्पाद भवन, भूतल, नवीन पुलिस केंद्र के समीप
काँके रोड, राँची- 834008

अति अल्पकालिन ई–आमंत्रण पत्रांक सं०–J0SBCL/01 दिनांक– 10.01.2026

इच्छा की अभिव्यक्ति हेतू अति अल्पकालिन ई–आमंत्रण सूचना

झारखण्ड राज्य बिवरेजेज कॉरपोरेशन लिमिटेड, राँची
मदिरा संचयन गोदाम हेतू इच्छा की अभिव्यक्ति हेतू अति अल्पकालिन ई–आमंत्रण सूचना

क्र0सं0	विवरणी	अभ्युक्ति
1	इच्छा की अभिव्यक्ति के प्रपत्र को वेवसाईट https://jharkhand tenders.gov.in एवं http://jsbcl.in पर अपलोड करने की तिथि	दिनांक– 12.01.2026
2	इच्छा की अभिव्यक्ति को ऑनलाईन https://jharkhandtenders.gov.in के माध्यम से जमा करने की प्रारंभिक तिथि	दिनांक– 13.01.2026
3	इच्छा की अभिव्यक्ति को Online रूप से जमा करने की अंतिम तिथि	दिनांक– 19.01.2026 के अपराह्न 06.00 बजे तक
4	इच्छा की अभिव्यक्ति को ऑनलाईन माध्यम से तकनीकि बिड खोलने की तिथि	दिनांक– 21.01.2026 के अपराह्न 04:00 बजे

नोटः– (1) इच्छा की अभिव्यक्ति की विस्तृत जानकारी प्राप्त करने हेतु https://jharkhandtenders.gov.in एवं http://jsbcl.in से डाउनलोड किया जा सकता है।
(2) इच्छा की अभिव्यक्ति हेतू आवेदन ऑनलाईन https://jharkhandtenders.gov.in माध्यम से ही स्वीकार की जायेगी एवं इसकी भौतिक प्रति राँची स्थित झारखण्ड राज्य बिवरेजेज कॉरपोरेशन लिमिटेड मुख्यालय में जमा की जानी है।

ह०/– महाप्रबंधक (संचालन)
झारखण्ड राज्य बिवरेजेज
कॉरपोरेशन लिमिटेड, राँची

PR 370578 Excise (25-26)_D

DH
CHANGEMAKERS 2026
CELEBRATING THE POWER OF GOOD
L K Atheeq
IAS (retied) Chairperson, Bengaluru Business Corridor
Vanamala Viswanatha
Academic and Translator
Prof M S Sriram
Professor Public Policy, IIM Bangalore
Dr. Vijayalakshmi
Former Director - Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology
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CENTRAL RAILWAY
सोलापुर मण्डल
इंजीनियरिंग कार्य

मध्य रेल कार्यालय मंडल रेल प्रबंधक (कार्य) सोलापुर भारत के राष्ट्रपति के लिए और उनकी ओर से दिनांक को बजे तक निम्नलिखित कार्यों के लिए ई–निविदा आमंत्रित करते है : **01 कार्य का नाम : Development work at Osmanabad Good shed. 02 अनुमानित लागत : ₹ 14,04,56,375.21, 03 बयाना रक्कम : ₹8,52,300.00, 04 समापन की अवधी :12**(Twelve) Months, **05 अनुरक्षण की अवधी : 24**(Twenty Four) Months, **06. ई निविदा फार्म की किमत** : Nil, 07 **वेबसाइट ई निविदा फार्म जमा करने की अंतिम तरिख और समय:** 06/02/2026 up to 15:00 hrs. **08 वेबसाइट ई निविदा खोलने की तरिख और समय:** 06/02/2026 after 15:30 hrs. **09 वेबसाइट विवरण : www.ireps.gov.in,** नोट : संभावित निविदाकर्ताओं को सलाह दी जाती है कि वे निविदा बंद होने की तिथि से पहले इस वेबसाइट पर बार–बार जाएं ताकि इस निविदा वेबसाइट के लिए जारी किए किसी भी परिवर्तन/शुद्धिपत्र को नोट कर सकें : **www.ieps.gov.in** ANJ-11

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WEST CENTRAL RAILWAY

Electrical (Project) Branch, OPEN TENDER NIT No.: JBP-PROJECT-EPC-2025-02

The Deputy Chief Electrical Engineer (Project), West Central Railway, Jabalpur for and on behalf of President of India invites E-Tenders (EPC mode) from the reputed and experienced contractors through ON-Line for the following works. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender, and any such manual offer received shall be ignored. **NIT No. :** JBP-PROJECT-EPC-2025-02 dt: 08.01.2026., **Name of work with Location :** Design/ Modification, Supply. Erection, Testing and Commissioning of 132kV/55 kV Scott connected Traction Sub Station and switching posts with AT between feeding Bhadanpur (Incl.) Manikpur (Excl.) - Satna (Incl.) -Rewa (Incl.) section (without SCADA) of Jabalpur Division, WC Railway in connection with Up-gradation of Electric Traction System from 1x25 kV to 2x25 kV Traction System of WCR to meet 3000 MT loading target., **Approx cost of the work (in Rs.)** : Rs 183,53,00,000/-, **Cost of tender form : nil, Address of the office.:** Dy.CEE/Project/Jabalpur, West-Central Railway, G-Floor, CPM-Electrical building. Aside Railway stadium, JBP-482001, (M.P), **Bid Security (in Rs.)** : Rs 91,76,500/-, **Completion period :** 18 months, **Date & Time for submission of tender :** 19.02.2026 (Up to 11.00 hrs.), **Date & Time for opening of tender :** 25.02.2026. (at 11.00 hrs.) Complete details of tender document available on the Railway website https://ireps.gov.in and also placed on notice board of Dy.CEE/P/JBP office.

Sd./-
For Dy. Chief Electrical Engineer (Project),
West Central Railway, Jabalpur

स्वच्छ भारत अभियान
एक कदम स्वच्छता की ओर

CENTRAL RAILWAY
SOLAPUR DIVISION
ELECTRICAL WORK

The Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer (TRD), Central Railway, Solapur, for and on behalf of the President of India invites online e-tenders on Railways e-procurement website **www.ireps.gov.in** from reputed, experienced & licensed Electrical contractors for the following works. Tender No. **SUR/TD/T/2025/22R Name of Work: -** Electrical TRD portion of work in connection with provision of one long-haul loop line in each direction at Akkalkot Road station in Solapur Wadi section of Solapur Division. (Re-Invitation) **Estimated cost:- ₹1,23,61,215.70, Bid Security:- ₹2,11,800/-, Completion Period:-** 12 months, **Validity of offer:- 60 Days, Date & time of tender closing on website: - 09/02/2026 at 15.00 hours.** ANJ-10

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CENTRAL RAILWAY
SOLAPUR DIVISION
E-PROCUREMENT

Divisional Store Office Central Railway, Solapur for and on Behalf of President of India invites online e-tenders on Railway's e-procurement website **www.ireps.gov.in** from the capable, reputed firms/ Contractors for the following works. **01. Tender No 96265001 02. Description :** Supply and installation of 04 (Four) sealer stainless steel benches of 304 grade stainless steel as per drawing.NO RDSO/WKS//2018/3. **03. Quantity :** 165 Nos. **04.Earnest Money (INR) : Rs.138240.00, Date & Time of Closing of Tender on www.ireps.gov.in 28-01-2026 after 11:30** The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website frequently before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/ corrigenda issued for this tender. **Website: www.ireps.gov.in.** ANJ-06

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Government of Gujarat

Shri Narendra Modi
Hon'ble Prime Minister

Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Gujarat

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Shri Harsh Sanghavi
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CM 1L housing scheme awaits beneficiary list, says RGHCL

BENGALURU, DHNS: Rajiv Gandhi Housing Corporation Limited (RGHCL) Managing Director Parashuram Shinnalkar assured on Saturday that funds deposited by citizens under the Chief Minister's One Lakh House Scheme are secure and that 19,000 houses are ready for immediate distribution.

The Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) deposited Rs 5 lakh per beneficiary into the RGHCL bank account to provide housing for the city's poor. However, Shinnalkar stated that the allotment has been stalled because the GBA was yet to furnish the final list of beneficiaries.

"The amount deposited by the GBA is safe, and there is no need for worry. Houses under the Chief Minister's One Lakh House Scheme will be allotted as soon as the corporation provides the list," Shinnalkar said, adding that several letters have already been written to the GBA requesting the data.

The MD further clarified that while the GBA had previously offered to take the money back, the corporation could not return it due to a stay order by the High Court.

Responding to recent protests by beneficiaries at the RGHCL office, he maintained that there has been no negligence on the part of the housing corporation and that the facts have been transparently conveyed to the public. Allotment will commence the moment the administrative hurdle of the beneficiary list is cleared.

'Only 35-50% of donated eyes fit for transplants'

Transplants, from Page 3

Many eye banks have now started short-term courses to train professionals in collecting donated eyes. "We offer certified training programmes and short-term diplomas for collectors and counsellors. Through this, we ensure that there is no problem while retrieving the cornea," said Thyagaraju from Lions International Eye Bank.

While the loss rate at renowned eye banks is 25%-35%, many multi-speciality hospitals see loss rates of up to 60%.

Many eye banks take precautionary steps before collecting eyes to ensure the donors' families are aware that donated eyes may not be used for transplant.

"We conduct a blood test before collecting the donated eye to rule out any medical conditions. If the outer layer is damaged, we collect the inner layer. Now, since the technology has advanced, we have better ways to collect and transport the donated eyes," said Veeresh M P M from Dr Rajkumar Eye Bank.

Eyes that cannot be used to transplant are used for training and research.

"About 35-50% of the donated eyes will not be useful for transplants due to various reasons. However, even unused transplant tissues are not simply discarded. Many are used for education, research and surgical training, and for therapeutic or tectonic grafts (in selected cases)," Dr Sanjana Vatsa, Cornea and refractive surgeon at a well-known eye hospital in the city.

Doctors urged the families of donors to contact the eye bank soon after death to prevent the eye from going waste.

The demolition drive has left residents out onto the streets.

Munir Ahmed and his family, who have been given one-week ultimatum to vacate, hold up property papers on Saturday. DH PHOTOS/ASHWIN B M

Residents in Thanisandra left in cold as eviction fear grips layout

Question why govt authorities allowed registration

ASHWIN B M
BENGALURU, DHNS

The Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) has now issued a one-week ultimatum to remaining residents to vacate their homes from Tuba Layout and Vidyasagar Layout in Thanisandra, leaving many on the brink of collapse.

A sense of panic and betrayal pervaded the localities near Saraipalya on Saturday.

For residents like Munir Ahmed, the BDA's move is a financial death sentence. He recently bought a small, sheet-roofed house for Rs 55 lakh, a sum gathered by pledging family jewelry and taking high-interest loans.

"I registered this property in November 2025 and paid Rs 3.9 lakh in stamp duty to the government. I have the E-Khata, Bescom bills and a Cauvery water connection," Ahmed said. "If this was BDA land, why did the sub-registrar allow the transaction? Why did the government take my money?"

He currently houses a family of 15. "If they break this house, we will die here. We have nowhere else to go."

Residents claim the BDA arrived with 50-60 police officers and multiple JCBs without providing any prior legal notice or warrants.

Sameeullah a local, pointed out that while 36 houses were razed, large properties belonging to influential politicians in the immediate vicinity remain untouched.

Ahmed's family echoed this frustration, holding up their legal papers: "Within three months of purchase, they arrive with JCBs. If the property belongs to the BDA, how did the registration court give us a stamp and seal for lakhs of rupees? This is a completely illegal action."

Evictees on streets

Elderly residents and children with disabilities were seen lying on the ground near the debris. One elderly woman, covered in dust, could only point to the remains of her home in tears. The crisis has also hit the labour class.

Shaguftha Anjum, a domestic worker, has been unable to go to work since the eviction. She now spends her days guarding her few remaining belongings piled on the roadside.

The evictees report that finding new shelter is nearly impossible due to high pricing in neighbouring areas where owners are demanding advance amounts ranging from Rs 50,000 to 1 lakh and rents have spiked to between Rs 10,000 and 20,000.

Residents pleaded for intervention from local MLA Krishna Byre Gowda and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar to either allow them to keep their homes or refund the life savings they paid into a system they were led to believe was legal.

BDA forms panel to verify residents' documents

A senior BDA official stated that a committee had been formed to ascertain whether legal notices had been served on the evictees.

The committee, led by retired judges Niyaz Ahmed and Surya Vamsi, will investigate the legal lapses of the drive, if any, and verify the validity of residents' documents, such as e-khata certificates, to determine if any genuine ownership exists or if the land was sold illegally by third parties.

"Because in some cases, we have to issue the notices, and in some other cases, we need not issue the notices, so the committee will go into all the legal aspects," he explained.

The official said temporary arrangements for food and shelter had been made for the evictees. The official further said remaining "encroachments" would be cleared after asking the inhabitants to find alternative housing or show the (ownership) papers.

"When the committee establishes that the papers are not legal, then we will go and remove them, too," he stated.

The BDA official maintained that the demolition drive had been happening for the last three months and would not stop.

"When it comes to residents, we will give them the opportunity to shift to some other place before demolishing (the houses). We are here to recover the BDA land, not to demolish houses. So we will do it in a balanced manner," he explained.

Techie who shot wife dead had hired hitman for job, talks failed over money

BENGALURU, DHNS

A 40-year-old techie, who allegedly shot his wife dead last month for having an affair, had originally planned to get her eliminated by a contract killer. He dropped the idea after the prospective assassin demanded more money.

Bhuvaneshwari

Selva Balamurugan

Police have now arrested the suspected hitman — 35-year-old Moulesh from Salem, Tamil Nadu — for not alerting the authorities about the murder plot.

Selva Balamurugan (40) allegedly shot his wife, Bhuvaneshwari (39), with a country made pistol on December 23 and surrendered before the police soon after the incident.

During the interrogation, Balamurugan disclosed to the police that he had initially planned to have his wife killed by a hitman. Acting on this information, Magadi Road police arrested Moulesh, a habitual offender lodged in a Salem prison in a theft case, on a body warrant, a senior officer said.

Balamurugan had searched online for contacts and came in touch with Moulesh, who came to Bengaluru and stayed in a hotel for three days.

Balamurugan assigned him two tasks: work as a private detective to identify the person allegedly having an affair with his wife and then kill her at a location without CCTV coverage to evade evidence.

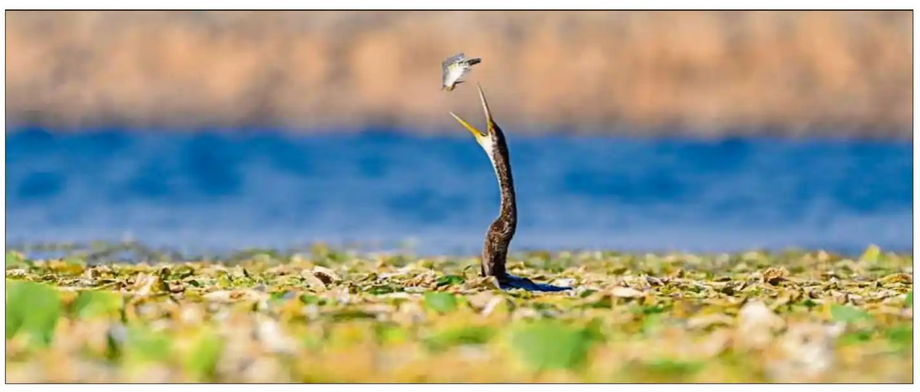
Balamurugan offered him Rs 1.5 lakh to execute the crime but Moulesh demanded more money, which the former refused to pay.

Moulesh then returned to his hometown without informing Balamurugan. Balamurugan then decided to kill his wife himself.

Police said Moulesh did not alert the authorities about the murder plot despite knowing Balamurugan's intentions. He was later arrested in a theft case and lodged in jail in Selam, from where police brought him to Bengaluru on Friday as part of the investigation.

Police said Balamurugan had travelled to Bihar in July 2025 to illegally procure firearms. While he had allegedly acquired two pistols, police recovered only one pistol along with two magazines from him.

PLAYING WITH PREY



An oriental darter tosses up its prey with its peak in the backwaters of Almatti reservoir in Vijayapura district on Saturday. PHOTO BY PRAVEEN BADDI

7 wood science institute staff booked for using proxy for recruitment exam

BENGALURU, DHNS:

Seven employees of the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) allegedly hired impostors to take recruitment examinations on their behalf and illegally secured government jobs.

The Sadashivanagar police, who have registered an FIR, said the suspects used proxy candidates to appear for written examinations conducted by ICFRE for various posts, including Multi-Tasking Staff (MTS) and Forest Guard, between 2018 and 2023.

The suspects have been identified as Dinesh, Sudhir, Prince, Sonu and Praveen from Haryana, and Rajkumar and Sunil Kumar Yadav, from Bihar. Six of them were recruited as MTS, while Yadav was appointed as a Forest Guard.

A senior police officer said the accused were appointed to various posts between 2019 and 2023 after appearing for recruitment examinations conducted by ICFRE. They include six Multi-Tasking Staff (MTS) and one Forest Guard. The fraud came to light after a detailed internal probe and forensic examination of examination records.

The complaint, filed by a senior official of the Institute of Wood Science and Technology (IWST), stated that an internal verification was ordered by the Director General, ICFRE, following complaints of irregularities in recruitments across ICFRE institutions.

During scrutiny, officials found serious discrepancies between the documents submitted at the time of recruitment and verified reference records.

Suspecting impersonation, the records were sent to the State Forensic Science Laboratory. In its report, the SFSL concluded that the handwriting and signatures on the examination documents did not match those of the appointed employees, and that different individuals had written the examinations and signed the documents in all seven cases.

"The forensic opinion clearly establishes that the accused did not personally appear for the recruitment examinations and instead engaged unknown persons to impersonate them," the FIR stated.

Police said the accused have been booked under charges of criminal conspiracy, cheating, impersonation, and forgery.

Bengal cops begin probe into document 'theft' by ED sleuths

Bengal cops, from Page 3

Cases at the Shakespeare Sarani police station were lodged under sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) pertaining to criminal intimidation, theft and criminal trespass, as well as under Section 66 of the IT Act, which deals with computer-related offences, criminalising dishonest or fraudulent acts like unauthorised access or data damage, the officer said.

Besides, the police also lodged a suo motu case at the same police station against the agency on Thursday evening.

Talking more about the case, the officer said the central agency personnel had conducted a search at Jain's Loudon Street apartment around 6.15 am on Thursday, but the Kolkata Police was informed five hours later via email.

"Upon receiving news of the search, the police officers, including the Deputy Commissioner of Police (South), went to Jain's residence to speak to ED officials. They were obstructed by ED and CRPF personnel present there, at times raised batons towards officers," the officer alleged.

The investigation was initiated after the TMC chairperson's allegations regarding the theft of Trinamool Congress election-related documents.

"The ED officials did not show identity cards or inform local authorities of the search. When police requested details, including the court-issued search warrant, they were allegedly pushed and blocked from entering," the officer said.

Investigators also spoke to the manager of the building housing Jain's flat and asked for the CCTV camera footage during the raid by the central agency officers.

"The footage will be sent for forensic tests. It will act as evidence and help us check the activities of the central agency officers," he said, adding that Jain's household staff were also questioned in detail about Thursday's incident.

Meanwhile, another team of police officers from the Electronic Complex police station visited the office of the I-PAC and collected evidence from there.

They also spoke to the security guards and other witnesses who were present during the raid of the central probe agency officials, he added.

Cong, BJP to fight it out in Bagalkot, D'gere South bypolls

Deaths of Shamanur, H Y Meti created vacancies

SUJAY B M
BENGALURU, DHNS

In a test of electoral might, the Congress and the BJP will lock horns in the upcoming bye-elections at Bagalkot and Davangere South Assembly constituencies.

The bypolls are due following the demise of veteran Congressmen H Y Meti (Bagalkot), who passed away on November 4, and Shamanur Shivashankarappa (Davanagere South), who passed away on December 14.

The bypolls have to be held within six months of the seat being vacated. Both polls will mostly be held simultaneously.

With the JD(S) having a negligible presence in both constituencies, the fight will be bipolar between the two national parties. Traditionally, the ruling party has an advantage in the bypolls.

Davangere South

Davangere South is a Congress stronghold, with Shamanur Shivashankarappa—a Lingayat—winning it for four consecutive terms (2008, 13, 18 and 23). He won the 2023 polls by a comfortable margin of 27,888 votes.

The constituency has 2.10 lakh voters (2023 polls). While the Congress claims that there are 80,000 minorities, the BJP puts the figure around 60,000-70,000. A Congress source said there were around 35,000 Lingayats, though the BJP feels their number is much more.

The constituency also has Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Kuruba and Maratha communities in significant numbers. In the Congress, Abdul Jabbar has emerged as a contender, while the names of Shamanur's son Ganesh and grandson Samarth (Minister S S Mallikarjun's son) are also doing the rounds. M T Subhashchandra is also a contender.

In the BJP, 2023 runner-up B G Ajay Kumar continues to be an aspirant. "Alongside him, others such as Srinivas Das Kariappa, Kollenalli Satish, Jayamma, Shivaprakash, Krishnamurthy Pawar have also taken application forms," BJP District President Rajashekhar Nagappa, said.

Bagalkot

Compared to Davanagere South, Bagalkot is a much tighter contest. For years, the constituency oscillated between BJP's Veeranna Charanthimath and Meti (Charantimath won in 2004, 08 and 18, while Meti won in 2013 and 23).

While Meti hails from the Kuruba community, Charanthimath is a Lingayat. In 2023, Meti won by a margin of 5,878 votes.

The constituency has 2.45 lakh electors (2023 polls). As per estimates, the Lingayats are in sizable numbers (around 70,000), while there are around 35,000 Muslims, 30,000 Kurubas and so on.

In the Congress, likely, either Mallikarjun Meti or Umesh Meti (sons of Meti) will get the ticket.

"Meti was a victorious candidate, and hence his family will get preference. Yesterday, Bagalkot District In-charge Minister R B Thimmapur discussed with 36-37 leaders. We have opined in favour of his family getting the ticket," said S G Nanjayyanamath, Congress leader and former MLA.

Thimmapur confirmed this to *DH*, adding that he would convey the opinion of the local leaders to party leadership.

In the BJP, it is likely that Charanthimath or two-time MLA Pralhad Pujari (1998 and 99) will get the ticket.

4 bypolls since 2023

After the Congress came to power in 2023, there were four by-elections at Shorapur, Channapatna, Sandur and Shiggaon, all of which were won by the Congress.

While the ruling party will be keen on maintaining its dominance in these two bypolls, it might also be an opportunity for the BJP to do better than previous outings.

67 cattle rescued, 6 arrested

HOSAPETE (VIJAYANAGAR DISTRICT), DHNS: The Hosapete Rural Police arrested six persons involved in illegal transportation of as many as 67 cattle by two container trucks in the early hours of Saturday.

The arrested have been identified as Talahat, K P Dinesh, Salim - all of Wayanad in Kerala; Ramesh of HD Kote in Mysuru district, Mallaiah and Swami of Gundlupet in Chamarajnagar district.

Search is on to trace the owners of two vehicles, Superintendent of Police S Jahnavi said.

Based on a complaint lodged by one G C Shivakumar, the two vehicles were intercepted near Kotaginal Cross on Hosapete-Ballari Highway.The cattle and trucks have been seized, police said.

4 killed in truck-car collision

HIRIYUR (CHITRADURGA DISTRICT), DHNS: Four persons died on the spot in a head-on collision between a car and truck near Hindasakatte in Hiriyur taluk on Bidar-Srirangapatna state highway on Saturday night.

The deceased have been identified as Vishwanath and Yeshwanth (both aged 22), Nanjundi and Rahul (both aged 23). They were returning to Hiriyur after dinner when the accident occured. The car was reduced to a heap of metal due to the impact of collision. Hiriyur Rural police have registered a case.

11 shops reduced to ashes in Aurad fire mishap

AURAD (BIDAR DISTRICT), DHNS: As many as 11 shops in front of the bus stand here were reduced to ashes in a massive fire that broke out in the early hours of Saturday. The loss of property is estimated at over Rs 1.5 crore.

Utensils worth lakhs of rupees were gutted in a metal store after a fire that broke out in a shop spread to 11 stores, at Aurad in Bidar district on Saturday.

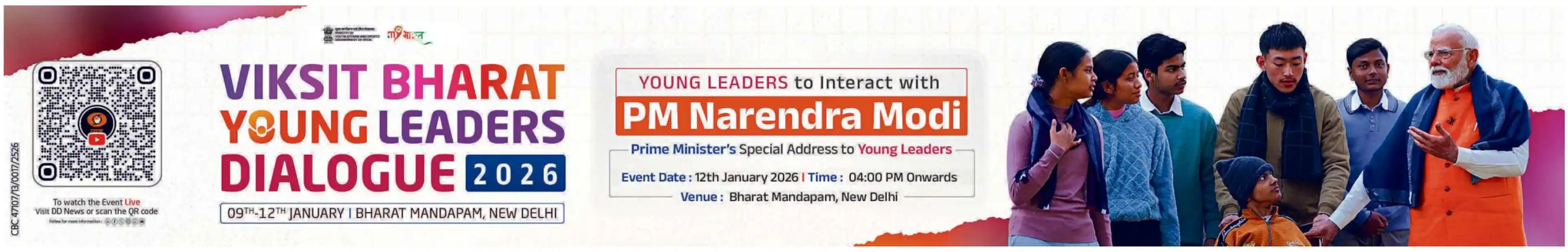
Materials stored in metal, hardware, footwear and provision shops, along with furniture, were gutted in the fire suspected to be triggered by an electrical short circuit.

A fire engine was pressed into service to bring the blaze under control. But it soon ran out of water.

The shops were reduced to ashes before three more fire engines could reach the spot, eyewitnesses said.

Probe underway

Tahsildar Mahesh Patil told reporters that an investigation was underway to ascertain the cause of fire and the total losses incurred in the fire mishap.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Prime Minister's Special Address to Young Leaders
Event Date : 12th January 2026 I Time : 04:00 PM Onwards
Venue : Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi
CBC 47107/13/0017/2526

CM flags Karnataka's low conviction rate, promises prosecutors' academy

BENGALURU, DHNS

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday promised the establishment of a prosecutors' academy to improve the conviction rate in Karnataka.

Speaking at the inaugural session of the 17th state-level conference and training workshop for prosecutors organised by the Department of Prosecution and Government Litigations, he expressed concern over Karnataka's standing in the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report. He noted that the state currently ranks 22nd in the country in terms of conviction rates, trailing significantly behind several other states.

According to the latest NCRB report, Karnataka ranks alongside Bihar and Rajasthan for its conviction rate. While Mizoram leads the nation with a conviction rate of 92% and other states like Kerala (87%), Uttar Pradesh (72%) and Delhi (89%) have shown significantly better results.

The chief minister noted that even states like Gujarat and Telangana maintained higher rates at 57%, emphasising that Karnataka must look toward Kerala as a benchmark for improving its judicial outcomes through better coordination between police and prosecutors.

He underscored the duty of the legal fraternity to uphold equality and justice in an unequal society.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Home Minister G Parameshwara, Law & Parliamentary Affairs Minister H K Patil participate in the state-level conference and training workshop for prosecutors organised by the department of prosecution and government litigations in Bengaluru on Saturday. High Court judge Justice H P Sandesh and additional chief secretary Tushar Giri Nath are seen. DH PHOTO

He stressed the need for seamless coordination between the executive, legislature, and judiciary to ensure a welfare state, as he pledged to establish a dedicated academy for public prosecutors in the state.

Siddaramaiah invoked the age-old legal maxim: "Let a hundred guilty men go free, but let not one innocent person be punished."

He reminded prosecutors that while they represent the state, their primary duty is to be guardians of justice.

Recognising the rise in cyber and economic offenses, he called for facilitating continuous learning and specialised training for prosecutors.

He also drew attention to the newly implemented Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS).

"Sections 8 and 9 of the new code specifically delineate the roles and classifications of prosecutors. It is designed to protect the rights of the accused while ensuring a fair trial. Prosecutors must exercise extreme caution during the examination of witnesses and cross-examinations to ensure that the truth is brought before the court," the CM said.

The chief minister assured the Karnataka State Prosecutors' Association that the government would provide necessary grants and review their pending demands.

Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H K Patil, High Court Justice H P Sandesh and Additional Chief Secretary Tushar Giri Nath were among the dignitaries present.

Imposing language on linguistic minorities unacceptable: CM

MANGALURU, DHNS: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday strongly opposed the Kerala government's Malayalam Language Bill, terming it an unacceptable attempt to forcefully impose the language on linguistic minorities.

"They have no right to do this. It is wrong to insist that people who speak their mother tongue must first learn Malayalam as their primary language," the chief minister said, while speaking to reporters here on Saturday.

The chief minister said that he had written to the Kerala chief minister, expressing serious concerns over the Bill.

He warned that if the Kerala Governor gives assent to the Bill, the Karnataka government will strongly oppose it and fight against it.

"We will bring the issue to the notice of the President and the central government," Siddaramaiah said.

Responding to a question on the Karnataka Governor returning three Bills passed by the legislature, Siddaramaiah said that the latter had sought clarifications on the three Bills.

"We will provide the required clarifications," the chief minister said.

Speaking at the valedictory of Coastal Karnataka Tourism Conclave in Mangaluru, Siddaramaiah said that Karnataka can beat all states in GST collection by developing tourism in all three coastal districts.

THE KARNATAKA STATE CRICKET ASSOCIATION
M. Chinnaswamy Stadium, Cubbon Road, Bangalore – 560 001

TENDER NOTIFICATION

The Karnataka State Cricket Association, M. Chinnaswamy Stadium, Cubbon Road, Bangalore invites sealed tenders from GST compliant contractors for the work of Supply, installation, testing and commissioning of additional Fire Safety systems at KSCA, M. Chinnaswamy Stadium, Bangalore.

1	Name of Work:	Supply, installation, testing and commissioning of additional Fire Safety systems at KSCA.
3	Earnest Money Deposit:	Rs.5,50,000/- (to be enclosed in Technical Bid).
4	Cost of Tender Form:	Rs.15,000/- plus GST (Non-refundable)
5	Date of Issue of Tender Form:	12/01/2026 to 20/01/2026
6	Pre-bid Meeting:	19/01/2026 at 4:30 pm
7	Last Date of Submission:	21/01/2026 before 4.00 PM
8	Opening of Technical Bid:	21/01/2026 at 5.30 PM
9	Completion of Work:	30 days from date of Work Order

Tender documents may be obtained from the Office of KSCA Electrical Department between 11.00 AM to 5.00 PM on working days.

Sd/- Chief Executive Officer
KSCA

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		Asso. Professor	02		
		Senior Resident	03		
02	Biochemistry	Asst. Professor	01	MBBS., MD.,	
		Senior Resident	03		
03	Physiology	Asst. Professor	03	MBBS., MD.,	
		Senior Resident	03		
04	Pharmacology	Asst. Professor	02	MBBS., MD.,	
		Asso. Professor	01		
		Senior Resident	03		
05	Pathology	Asst. Professor	02	MBBS., MD.,	
06	Microbiology	Senior Resident	03	MBBS., MD.,	
07	Community Medicine	Senior Resident	02	MBBS., MD.,	
08	Forensic Medicine	Asst. Professor	01	MBBS., MD.,	
		Asso. Professor	01		
		Senior Resident	03		
09	General Medicine	Asst. Professor	01	MBBS., MD.,	
		Senior Resident	02		
10	Emergency Medicine	Senior Resident	02	MBBS., MD., or MS, DNB	
11	General Surgery	Senior Resident	03	MBBS., MS.,	
12	Anaesthesiology	Senior Resident	01	MBBS., MD., or DA or DNB MBBS., MD.,	
13	ENT	Asst. Professor	01	MBBS., MS.,	
14	Ophthalmology	Senior Resident	01	MBBS., MS.,	

Note: Retired Medical teachers from Government services are also eligible to apply.

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Place: Chitradurga

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ನಮೋ ಬುದ್ಧಾಯ

ಡಾ. ಎಚ್.ಎಂ. ಗಂಗಾಧರಯ್ಯ
ಸಂಸ್ಥಾಪಕರು, ಶ್ರೀ ಸಿದ್ಧಾರ್ಥ ಶಿಕ್ಷಣ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆ (ರಿ)

ನಮೋ ಬುದ್ಧಾಯ

ಡಾ. ಜೆ ಶಿವಪ್ರಸಾದ್
ಸ್ಥಾಪಕ ಕುಲಾಧಿಪತಿಗಳು, ಸಾಹೆ, ತುಮಕೂರು

ಪುಣ್ಯಾರಾಧನೆ

ಶ್ರೀಮತಿ ಗಂಗಾಂಬಿಕ ರವರು

(ಜನನ: 01-01-1951 – ನಿಧನ: 01-01-2026)

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ದಿನಾಂಕ: 01-01-2026 ರಂದು ವಿಧಿವಶರಾದರೆಂದು ತಿಳಿಸಲು ವಿಷಾದಿಸುತ್ತೇವೆ. ತತ್ಸಂಬಂಧವಾದ
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ಡಾ। ಜಿ.ಎಸ್. ಆನಂದ್
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GUNS 'N' REDDYS Clash a blow to 'scheduled' appropriation of tribes by Cong, its MLA

2nd Valmiki statue at junction: Old rivalry comes full circle

PAVAN KUMAR H
HUBBALLI, DHNS

Wrapped in plastic covers, a 10-foot-tall statue of Maharshi Valmiki sits at SP Circle, one of the busiest junctions in Ballari.

Uncertainty now looms over its inauguration after violence erupted two days before the scheduled event on January 3, including stone-pelting, firing of bullets in the air and the death of a Congress worker.

Had it been inaugurated, this would have been the second Valmiki statue at the junction.

The earlier one, installed over a decade ago, is identified with BJP — particularly former minister B Sriramulu — as it stands in front of his office.

Bellary City MLA Nara Bharath Reddy proposed a larger, grander statue of "Valmiki ajja" at the widened and redeveloped junction, seeking to establish it as a Congress landmark.

Appropriation of Valmiki is politically significant in Ballari, where nearly 55% of the population belongs to Scheduled Tribes and electoral fortunes often hinge on this community's support.

Political observers say the statue inauguration was one of the strategies adopted by Bharath Reddy to achieve multiple objectives: consolidate ST support, further marginalise the defeated Sriramulu (who projects himself as a key ST leader in the region) and improve his chances of securing a ministerial berth following Bellary (Rural) MLA B Nagendra's resignation over alleged misappropriation of funds in the Karnataka Maharshi Valmiki Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation Limited.

However, experts say the January 1 incident, in which gunshots were fired at the residence of mining baron Gali Janardhan Reddy, has badly boomeranged on Bharath Reddy and the Congress.

BJP leaders now have an emotive plank to target the Congress, citing the incident and the police's failure to prevent escalation as evidence of the government's inability to maintain law and order.

The January 1 incident has revived memories of what former Lokayukta Justice Santosh Hegde once described as the "Republic of Ballari," marked by lawlessness and large-scale illegal mining.

"The installation of banners and the proposed inauguration of the Valmiki statue were merely a smokescreen. Political one-upmanship was the real objective," says senior journalist Ahiraj.

"Bharath wanted to project himself as one of the most influential leaders in Ballari and rub salt into the wounds of Sriramulu, who has lost the last three elections. By his immature handling of the situation, he however played into the hands of the BJP," he says.

Ahiraj recalled that the Nara family — Bharath and his father Suryanarayan — and the Reddy brothers — Janardhan, Karunakar and Somashekar along with Sriramulu — have been at loggerheads for over two decades.

A file photo of the new 10-foot-tall Maharshi Valmiki statue being brought to Ballari city.

"They have openly traded barbs even on the floor of the Assembly. That animosity is now spilling onto the streets of Ballari," Ahiraj says.

Political observers say the rivalry extends beyond top leaders to their aides and followers.

Two months ago, Janardhan Reddy's close associate Ali Khan and Bharath Reddy's aide Satish Reddy were involved in a bitter dispute over tenders and contract settlements, triggering clashes and police cases against both. Since 2000, the two sides have repeatedly confronted each other.

"While the Reddy brothers once pushed the Nara family into political irrelevance during the peak of the 'Republic of Ballari,' the return of a Congress government has emboldened Bharath to settle scores with Janardhan Reddy, who was recently allowed by the Supreme Court to enter Ballari," said another senior journalist.

Multiple Congress sources told *DH* that the January 1 incident had severely dented Bharath Reddy's prospects.

During recent visits by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy CM D K Shivakumar to the district, Bharath was reportedly kept at a distance.

"The chief minister was furious and reprimanded him. Except for Kampli MLA Ganesh J N, none of the Congress MLAs or the Bellary MP is fully backing Bharath," a party insider said.

Observers believe the incident has brought Sriramulu and Janardhan Reddy closer. Until recently, Sriramulu had blamed Janardhan Reddy for his defeats in the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. BJP leaders now say the episode has united them.

"By firing bullets at Janardhan Reddy's house, the Congress has handed him an opportunity to emotionally connect with people. Even those critical of his past are now sympathising with him," a BJP leader said.

"The death of Rajashekar Reddy, an ST, in the incident has angered sections of the community".

Hate Speech Bill is draconian, unnecessary, says B V Acharya

Warns against 'bid to curtail freedom of expression, personal liberty'

BENGALURU, DHNS

The proposed state Hate Speech Bill could be stalled by the Governor by declining assent or referring it to the President if it is repugnant to the existing central laws, former advocate-general B V Acharya said on Saturday.

The senior advocate was addressing a seminar here on 'Hate Speech Bill and Civil Liberties' organised by Citizens for Democracy.

"Luckily, the Bill has not yet received the Governor's assent. People must be made aware of its consequences. Governor (Thaawarchand Gehlot) is constitutionally bound to consider public representations and can decline assent or reserve the Bill for the President's consideration," Acharya said, calling freedom of expression and personal liberty the "most cherished fundamental rights." Any attempt to curtail these rights, he warned, must be resisted.

"If there is repugnancy between a Central and a State law on a subject in the concurrent list, the Central law will prevail unless the state Bill receives the President's assent," Acharya said, adding that citizens should actively petition the President to stall the "draconian and unnecessary" law.

Pointing out that existing provisions under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) already address hate speech-related offences, Acharya said, "Sec 299 (deliberate and malicious acts meant to outrage religious feelings) and Sec 196 (promoting enmity between groups based on religion and caste), which deal with similar objectives, already exist. The Bill merely changes wording while expanding definitions dangerously."

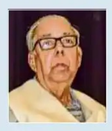
Acharya also flagged "vague" definitions of "hate speech," inclusion of even deceased persons and punishing organisations without clarity on liability. He also highlighted the disproportionate punishment prescribed under the proposed law.

"While the Central law prescribes imprisonment up to three years or fine, the state Bill proposes punishment up to seven years with a minimum of one year and fines up to Rs 50,000. This is grossly disproportionate to the alleged offence," he said.

'A potential Bhasmasura'

Former police officer Jyothi Prakash Mirji questioned how organisations could be punished for an individual's speech and warned of an "arrest first, investigate later" culture. "Will the government open hate-speech police stations too," he asked, calling the Bill a potential "Bhasmasura" that could turn against the government itself.

B V ACHARYA
Former advocate general



"If there is repugnancy between a Central and a State law on a subject in the concurrent list, the Central law will prevail unless the state Bill receives the President's assent.

Kannada publisher, writer Asha Raghu dies by suicide

BENGALURU, DHNS: Kannada publisher and writer Asha Raghu died by suicide at her residence in Malleswaram on Friday night, police said. She was 46.

A senior police officer said Asha was found hanging inside a room. Family members broke open the door after receiving no response, but she was found dead.

She is survived by her daughter. Her husband K C Raghu had died two years ago. Police said Asha had been under depression following her husband's untimely death due to health issues.

Asha Raghu

A case of unnatural death has been registered, and further investigation is underway. However, no suicide note was found.

The body was handed over to the family after the post-mortem conducted at Victoria Hospital.

Asha was known as a novelist and had also worked in the television industry as a dialogue writer and assistant director.

(If you are experiencing thoughts of self-harm and suicide, please reach out to the 14416 TeleMANAS helpline for support.)

Siddaramaiah's tenure as CM is currently on lease, claims HDK

BENGALURU, DHNS: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's tenure at the helm was 'on lease' and the CM was bargaining with the Congress high command for an extension, claimed Union Minister for Steel and Heavy Industries H D Kumaraswamy in Bengaluru on Saturday.

"Siddaramaiah, who is celebrating having broken D Devaraj Urs' record as the longest-serving CM of Karnataka, is on lease. Urs challenged even former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, but Siddaramaiah is bargaining with the high command for time," said Kumaraswamy.

Queried about reports of Hindustan Machine Tools' (HMT) closure, Kumaraswamy said, "It has not been shut; production of watches is still under way, albeit at a smaller scale. HMT's disinvestment had been announced as early as 2016. I have been discussing the possibility of reviving HMT by adopting new technologies with PM Narendra Modi."

H D KUMARASWAMY
Union Minister

"Siddaramaiah, who is celebrating having broken D Devaraj Urs' record as the longest-serving CM of Karnataka, is on lease. Urs challenged even former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, but Siddaramaiah is bargaining with the high command for time.

Multi-purpose sports facility in Mandya at Rs 14 cr

NEW DELHI, DHNS:

Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy said on Saturday that the union ministry of sports had sanctioned Rs 14 crore for the construction of a multi-purpose sports facility in Mandya under Khelo India scheme.

Kumaraswamy

The sanction comes after Kumaraswamy's request to Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports Mansukh Mandaviya, seeking support for the project and highlighting the sporting potential of Mandya.

At UAS premises

From the funds sanctioned by sports ministry, a multi-purpose indoor stadium will be constructed at the University of Agricultural Sciences, Mandya.

The proposed stadium will benefit local athletes, sports teams and the community at large by promoting physical activity, encouraging sports development and fostering social interaction, Kumaraswamy said in a statement.

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e-Auction Notification

KS&DL invites applications through e-Portal for below e-Auction. Documents for e-Auction can be downloaded from e-Portal through website https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in

Sl.No.	e-Auction Number	e-Auction Title	Date of e-Auction published	Last date to confirm interest for Participation in e- Auction	Date and Time of Live e-Auction
1	KSDL/2025-26/AUCTION21	Disposal of Scrap items at Sandalwood oil Division Shivamogga on As is where is Basis	10.01.2026	27.01.2026	Commences at 10.00 am & Concludes at 5:00 pm on 31.01.2026

Sd/- Asst. General Manager (Materials)

SAINIK SCHOOL KODAGU (KARNATAKA)
DIST: KODAGU PIN: 571 232
WALK-IN-INTERVIEW :: SCHOOL MEDICAL OFFICER
A walk-in-interview will be conducted for the post of School Medical Officer on Casual Basis in Sainik School Kodagu on 16 Jan 2026 Interested candidates are to report to the school by 1000 hrs along with Biodata, original and copies of Qualifications and Experience Certificates. The post is purely on Casual basis for a period of minimum 44 days and will be renewed from time to time as required by the school. For detailed Notification and Application Form, visit School website www.sainikschoolkodagu.edu.in from 11 Jan 26. The school administration reserves the right to cancel the vacancy, at any point due to administrative reasons.
Principal

Government of Karnataka - Department of Horticulture
Office of The Assistant Horticulture Director, Bio Centre, Shivamogga.
No.: AHD/BC/S/AHO(TS)/15/2025-26 Date: 08.01.2026
e-Tender Notice
e-Tender is invited for undertaking works of Span Production of various stages of Mushroom Laboratory of Shivamogga Bio Centre , Various Sapling Development works of Grafting Agriculture Laboratory and other Works under Department Laboratories Development Scheme and KSHDA Recurring Fund (Tender No.: KSHD/2025-26/SE0497). Last date for uploading e-Tender: 22.01.2026 within 4.00 PM. For further information visit www.kppp.karnataka.gov.in or contact this office Phone No.; 08182-240004.
Sd/-Assistant Director of Horticulture, Bio Centre, Shivamogga.
DIPR/smg/KSMCA/No.25-26/79/01/1583

Government of Karnataka
GRAMA PANCHAYATH BIRADAHALLI, Taluk Panchayath Sakaleshpur, ZillaPanchayath Hassan
(gmail-: skp. gp. birad@gmail. com) Phone number: 7760310667
No: G.P.B./ R.P.P.H.O. / E.T.M. Publication/ C.R.G./01/2025-26 Dated: - 07/01/2026
E-tender Notification:
The National PanchayatAward for the year 2025-26 for the Biradahalli Gram Panchayatis being implemented,for the purchase of solar high-mast, solar Street lights, solar-based electricity system for primary health center, clean drinking water plant and digital library and installation of solar grid for the Panchayat office . The tender amount for 66,00,000 / - EMD amount : 1,65,000/-. The tenderer or institution should fill the application through e-procurement as per the KTPP rules for the purchase of materials and work, given below time schedule and link. Tender schedule 1.Date & Time of Downloading of Blank Tender Applications (Annexure-I & Annexure-II) through e-Procurement: Date: 07-01 -2026 21-01-2026 At 5:00 pm. https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in https: / / eproc. karnataka. gov. in 2)LAST DATEFOR SUBMITTING SAMPLE AND CATALOGUE PRE BID MEETING DATE: 16-01-2026 With in5:00 P.M. 3)Date and time of opening of doucuments/ Technical Bid on e-Portal DATE: 22-01-2026 at 5:00 P.M. 4)Date and Time of Opening of documents / Financial Bids on e-Portal Date : 23-01-2026 at 11.00 AM 5)Contact details for more details Panchayat Development Officers Gram PanchayatBiradahalli 6)Gmail Skp.gp.birad@gmail.com MOB: 7760310667
Sd/-Panchayat Development Officers Gram Panchayat Biradahalli
ಪಾಸಾಸಂಇ/ಹಿಸನಿ/ಹಾಪಸನ/919/ಕೆಎಸ್ಎಂಪಿಎ/2025–26

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URL: www.kitven.in, Email: info@kitven.in, Ph:- 080-22385480
OFFERS INVITED FOR SALE OF UNITS OF KARNATAKA INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY VENTURE CAPITAL FUND 2 (KITVEN Fund 2), a SEBI registered Category I Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) - Venture Capital Fund (Migrated)
KITVEN Fund 2, registered under Indian Trust Act 1882, is a SEBI registered Category I AIF – VCF (Migrated). The Fund has unliquidated investments in 3 entities/ companies.
Karnataka Asset Management Company Pvt Ltd. (KAMCO) being the Fund Managers and Karnataka Trustee Company Pvt Ltd. (KATCO), being the Trustee of KITVEN Fund 2, invites interested parties to bid for the Units of the Fund, held by existing investors. Bids are invited for a min 25% of the value of unliquidated investments.
More information and supporting documents can be accessed from the following link as under **https://kitven.in/docs/kitven-2-bid-portal-jan-2026.pdf**
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BRIEF TENDER NOTICES
1.On behalf of the President of India, item-rate tender is invited for the following work:

Description	Details
Name of work	Supply, Installation, Testing and commissioning of 225 kWp Solar Panel covered Pedestrian Pathway at URSC – ISITE Campus
E-Tender Notice	URSC/C&MG/E/C/16/2025-26 Dt. 07/01/2025
Estimated cost put to Tender	₹ 239.40 Lakhs
Period of completion in months	Eight (08) Months
Earnest Money Deposit (EMD)	₹ 4,78,800/- Validity for 180 days

2.Interested tenderers may please refer Detailed Notice Inviting Tender (NIET) for eligibility criteria and other details in website: www.isro.gov.in and download the tender documents from www.tenderwizard.com/ISRO
Sd/- Group Director, C&MG, URSC

VP Radhakrishnan to visit Siddaganga Mutt on Jan 21

TUMAKURU, DHNS: Vice President C P Radhakrishnan will visit Siddaganga Mutt here on Jan 21 for the event to mark 7th Punya Sansmaranotsava (death anniversary) of Shivakumar Swami.

In a preparatory meeting at mutt premises on Saturday, seer Siddalinga Swami urged the district administration to follow protocol and ensure foolproof security during the VP's visit.

Speaking to reporters, Union Minister of State for Railways V Somanna said he had obtained details about the protocol to be followed during the VP's visit and preparations, from the officials.

Tumakuru Rural MLA B Suresh Gowda, city MLA G B Jyothiganesh, deputy commissioner Shubha Kalyan, superintendent of police K V Ashok and others were present.

Hospital not yet ready; Kanakapura misses med college bus again

Govt to submit applications for colleges in R'nagar, Bagalkot

BENGALURU, DHNS

Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar's constituency Kanakapura will not get a government medical college for the 2026-27 academic year too.

The department of medical education has decided not to submit the proposal to the National Medical Commission (NMC), seeking permission to establish a medical college in Kanakapura.

As the infrastructure, mainly the hospital, is not ready, the government has decided not to apply.

However, Minister for Medical education Dr Sharan Prakash Patil said the department would submit applications to set up colleges in Ramanagar (Bengaluru South) and Bagalkot.

"As the hospital in Kanakapura is not ready, we will not be applying. Hospital is the main infrastructure needed to establish a medical college, along with teaching and non-teaching staff," the minister said.

The proposal to set up colleges in Ramanagar and Kanakapura is on the cards for the last three years and is delayed because of the lack of infrastructure.

In 2023-24, 2024-25, 2025-26, NMC had denied permission to set up colleges at these locations due to lack of infrastructure.

Though the administrative approval was given to set up the college in Kanakapura, it did not take off as there is no hospital. A 220-bed hospital is needed for starting a medical college with 50 seats.

Interestingly, the government has sought funds from Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences (RGUHS) to establish medical colleges in Bagalkot and Kanakapura.

As per information available from RGUHS, the government has sought Rs 400 crore for the construction of the medical colleges.

As shared by Patil, "As much as 50% of the construction work of RGUHS' new campus in Ramanagar is completed and the remaining work will be completed in 6-7 months. A 300-bed hospital is also ready. Hence, we have decided to apply for the medical college in Ramanagar".

The minister said he had instructed all government medical colleges to apply for enhancement of seats by up to 50.

"For 2025-26, NMC sanctioned a total of 450 under-graduate and 421 post-graduate medical seats. I have instructed colleges with good infrastructure to submit proposals to enhance seats," Patil said.

A wild elephant brought down a tree bang in the middle of the road on the Charmadi Ghat stretch in Mudigere taluk of Chikkamagaluru district. Vehicles were stranded on either side for over an hour.

Jumbo blocks Charmadi Ghat road at night, vehicles stranded

MUDIGERE (CHIKKAMAGALURU DIST), DHNS: A wild elephant strayed on to the highway near the second curve of Charmadi Ghat on Friday night, disrupting traffic for over an hour.

The incident occurred around 9.45 pm, and vehicular movement on both sides came to a complete halt. Vehicles were lined up for nearly three km.

As the wild elephant had brought down a tree on the roadside, vehicles were unable to pass.

Due to the lack of network connectivity, motorists were unable to inform the forest department or the police on the phone and were left stranded.

Some motorists tried to chase the elephant into the forest, but without success. After about an hour, the elephant moved towards the forest, allowing motorists to clear the fallen tree and proceed in a single lane.

Forest department personnel, who reached the spot after receiving information, attempted to drive the elephant deep into the forest. After moving about 100 metres into the forest, the pachyderm returned to the road on Saturday afternoon, once again causing traffic disruption.

Motorists then chased it back towards the forest. Several travellers were seen getting out of their vehicles and taking selfies.

'Capture, relocate'

"Wild elephants are frequently sighted in Charmadi Ghat. There is a constant sense of fear, especially at night. The jumbos should be captured and relocated," the travellers demanded.

Kumaraswamy: States will get additional funds under VB-G RAM G Act

Union minister counsels K'taka govt not to confront Centre on all issues

BENGALURU, DHNS

Mounting a spirited defence of the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) or the VB-G RAM G Act, which has replaced MGNREGA, Union Minister for Steel and Heavy Industries H D Kumaraswamy on Saturday said that the new legislation would result in states gaining additional funds to the tune of Rs 17,000 crore.

Addressing a press conference, Kumaraswamy dismissed Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's claims of the new law passing on the financial burden of the employment scheme to the states.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi has corrected MGNREGA's flaws. The implementation of MGNREGA resulted in workers' money being looted for years. The new legislation will ensure accountability," said the union minister.

Counselling the Karnataka government not to adopt a confrontational stance vis-à-vis the Centre on all issues, Kumaraswamy said, "The state is incurring a loss owing to this confrontational attitude. The state government's ties with the Centre must be dictated by some common sense."

Accusing Congress of weaving a false narrative around VB-G RAM G Act, Kumaraswamy dismissed suggestions of the new legislation depriving the state and panchayats of authority.

"It is absurd that Congress leaders are finding fault over mistakes being corrected," said the union minister.

The new law's stipulation that states bear 40% of the expenditure for the employment scheme was meant to ensure accountability, said Kumaraswamy.

"States must understand their responsibility. They will get an additional Rs 17,000 crore, and everything will be routed through the gram panchayats," the former chief minister said.

Challenging the Congress party's accusations that Modi had insulted Mahatma Gandhi, Kumaraswamy said, "The Congress named everything after members of the Nehru family, and betrayed Gandhiji. The Congress has no moral authority to speak about Gandhi."

Under the old system, fake receipts were produced, and money looted, said Kumaraswamy.

Flaws in old law fixed

"These flaws were identified, fixed, and a new structure introduced," the union minister said.

Responding to Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar's challenge for an open debate, Kumaraswamy said that both the BJP and the JD(S) leaders would be more than willing to oblige the former. "We are not running away, and are ready for an open debate," he said.

State BJP president B Y Vijayendra, leader of Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka, among other leaders, were present at the press conference.

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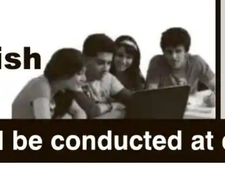

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   - Students are advised to pay the fees Prescribed by the University, which is available in the website. University is not responsible for any excess payment.
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   - Students may contact University official learner support centres for Pre Admission Counselling purpose only.
   - Identity Cards and available Self-Learning Materials can be collected by the students from the Head Office, KSOU at Mysuru or from any of the Regional Centres of their choice.
2. SC/ST Category eligible Candidates may get the admission under FES scheme by paying the prescribed fees subject to fee reimbursement from the Social Welfare Department, through State Scholarship Portal. Their admissions are made as per the conditions laid down by the Scholarship Cell of the University.
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2. **Bengaluru-1 Regional Centre:** Satellite Bus Stand Building, 1st Floor, Mysore Road, **Bapujinagar,** Bengaluru-560026. Phone: 080-26603664, Mobile: 9880526439 / 9019526439.
3. **Bengaluru-2 Regional Centre:** KSOU Women RC, Govt. PU College for Girls, 4th Main, 13th Cross, Near BESCOM Office, **Malleshwaram**, Bengaluru-560 003, Phone: 080-23448811, Mobile: 9741197921 / 9483517160.
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5. **Bengaluru-4 Regional Centre:** No. 121, 2nd Floor, besides Madiwala Traffic Police Station, near Happiest Mind, Hosur Main Road, Bengaluru-560068. Ph: 080-23158888, Mobile: 8618821417.
6. **Bengaluru-5 Regional Centre:** Government First Grade College Campus, **K. R. Puram,** Bangalore-560 036. Mobile : 8722788788.
7. **Bengaluru-6 Regional Centre:** Sri Lakshmi College of Management and Science Campus, No.4 & 5, Sri Gandhakaval, Magadi Main Road, **Sunkadakatte, Bengaluru**-560 091. Mobile: 84534 58238 / 96323 32265.
8. **Bengaluru-7 Regional Centre: Haj Bhavan, Thirumenahalli Cross, Hegde Nagara Main Road,** Bengaluru-560 064. Mobile: 9900667916.
9. **Belagavi Regional Centre:** Krantiveera Sangolli Rayanna Shikshana Mahavidyalaya Campus, Nehru Nagar, Belagavi-590 010. Tel: 0831 2002815, Mobile: 9663451169 / 9606040407.
10. **Ballari Regional Centre:** Behind Regional Science Center, Near District Stadium, Nellacheravu Pradesha, Ballari-583 102. Mobile: 78925 97159.
11. **Chamarajanagar Regional Centre:** K.H.B. Colony, Ramasamudhra Layout, Near Immanuel Christian Public School, Chamarajanagar-571 342, Mobile: 9980302686.
12. **Chikmagaluru Regional Centre:** Saimandira Road, Madhuvana Layout, Chikmagalur-577 101, Mobile: 8088716236.
13. **Davanagere Regional Centre:** J. H. Patel Layout, Behind Shamanur, Naganur Road, Davanagere-577004, Mobile: 9986458055 / 98449 26125.
14. **Dharwad Regional Centre:** Amaragola 2nd Stage, KHB Layout, near Judge Colony, Last Bus Stop, Navanagara, Hubli-580025. Phone: 0836-2441199, Mobile: 9916894944.
15. **Hassan Regional Centre:** S. M. Krishna Nagar, Arasikere Road, Doddapura (Post), B. T. Koppal, Hassan-573 118, Mobile: 81978 18807 / 08172262726.
16. **Kalburgi Regional Centre:** Institute of Kannada Studies, Gulbarga University Campus, Kalburgi-585 106, Mobile: 9916783555.
17. **Karwar Regional Centre:** Old U.S.K.V. Building, 1st Floor, Savitha Circle Main Road, Karwar-581 301, Mobile: 9916894944.
18. **Kolar Regional Centre:** Behind S. P. Office, Near R. L. Jalappa Hospital, Kolar-563 101, Tel: 0815-2243301, Mobile : 8970223247.
19. **Mandya Regional Centre:** No. 11(A), 'E' Block, Vivekananda Nagar Layout, Kere Angala, Opp. Santhemala, Melukote Road, Mandya-571 402, Tel: 08232200862, Mobile: 9741990284.
20. **Mangaluru Regional Centre**: Opp. Custom Quarters, 4th Cross, Dattanagar, Mangaluru-575 016, Te: 0824-2454697, Mobile: 9945058950 / 9972196692.
21. **Ramanagara Regional Centre:** # 103, 'E' Block, Shantiniketan Group of Institutions, B. M. Road, Vivekananda Nagar, Ramanagara-562 159, Mobile: 9448668880 / 8861732487.
22. **Shivamogga Regional Centre:** Alkola Circle, Near LIC Office, Sagara Road, Shivamogga-577 201, Phone: 08182-250367, Mobile: 8095695590.
23. **Tumakuru Regional Centre:** CA-07, TUDA Layout, Rajiv Gandhi Nagara, Melekote, Gangasandra Main Road, Tumakuru-572 105, Phone: 0816-2955580, Mobile: 9844506629.
24. **Udupi Regional Centre**: Old Zilla Panchayath Building, 2nd Floor, Bannanje, Udupi-576 101, Phone: 0820 - 2522247, Mobile: 9972526647 / 7975510679.
25. **Bidar-1 Regional Centre:** Government First Grade College, **Naubad,** Bidar-585402, Phone: 08482-232020, Mobile: 9986696487.
26. **Bidar-2 Regional Centre:** Karnataka Public School, **Gorata (B) Grama,** Halsoor Tq. Bidar-585 327, Mobile: 9986696487.
27. **Bagalkote Regional Centre:** B.V.V.S. Jana Shikshana Samsthe Campus, besides Basaveshwara Independent PU College,Vidyagiri, Bagalkote-587 103, Mobile: 8861040975 / 7353002301.
28. **Madikeri Regional Centre:** Junior College Campus, Field Marshal Kariappa Multipurpose Indoor Stadium, Madikeri - 571 201, Mobile: 8762551115.
29. **Kollegala Regional Centre :** Haricharan Arcade, 2nd Floor, South Extn. opp. Mahadeshwara Kalyana Mantap, Kollegala-571440, Mobile: 9980740048.
30. **Chitradurga Regional Centre:** Don Bosco Degree College, near BCM Hostel, Shanimahatma Temple Road, Challakere Road, Chitradurga-577501. Mobile: 74066 12788.
31. **Haveri Regional Centre:** Shri Shivalingeshwara Vidyapeeta, Hukkerimata, Haveri-581110. Mobile: 97432 76734.
32. **Chikkaballapura Regional Centre**: Government First Grade (Muncipal) College, M.G. Road, Chikkaballapura-562101. Mobile: 9164300299.
33. **Raichur Regional Centre:** Government First Grade College, Nijalingappa Colony, near Valmiki Circle, Lingasagur Road, Raichur-584101. Mobile: 9686619555.
34. **Yadagiri Regional Centre:** Government Degree College, Chittapura Road, Yadgiri-585202 Mobile: 9880061361.
35. **Vijayapura Regional Centre** : Near Satellite Bus Stand, Opp. Amba Bhavani Temple, **Vijayapura-586 101.** Mobile: 9483628267.
36. **Koppala Regional Centre** : **Urban Development Authority Office,** Office Building 1st Floor, Opp. Govanakoppa Hospital, Hospet Road, Koppala-583 231. Mobile: 9008588675 / 8722588675.
37. **Gadag Regional Centre :** Dr. Pandith Puttaraj Kavi Gawai's I.T.I. College, LL Building (Old DC Office Circle), General Kariappa Circle, Gadag-582101. Mobile: 8618929376 / 8884231002.
38. **Vijayanagara (Hosapete) Regional Centre :** Kannada University, Vidyaranya, Hampi, Vijayanagara Dist.-583 276, Mobile: 9945171920.
39. **Periyapatna Regional Centre :** D.P.B.S. Govt. PU College for Boys Campus (High School Section), B.M. Road, Near Bettadapura Circle, Periyapatna - 571107. Mobile: 9901423273.

Admission Starts from 09.01.2026

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Pocso cases warrant prompt, sensitive handling: Supreme Court

Sets aside bail, saying HC failed to consider nature, gravity of offences

ASHISH TRIPATHI
NEW DELHI, DHNS

The Supreme Court has said that proceedings under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Pocso) Act warranted prompt and sensitive handling.

The top court also emphasised that bail was not to be refused mechanically in such cases, but must not be granted on irrelevant considerations or by ignoring material evidence.

Allowing a plea by a survivor, a bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and R Mahadevan set aside an Allahabad High Court judgment of April 9, 2025, which granted bail to accused Arjun after failing to take into account the nature and gravity of the offences and the statutory rigour under the provisions of the Pocso Act.

"The offences alleged in the present case are heinous and grave, involving repeated penetrative sexual assault upon a minor victim committed under armed intimidation and accompanied by recording of the acts for blackmail. Such conduct has a devastating impact on the life of the victim and shakes the collective conscience of society," said the bench in a judgment on Friday.

Upon noticing that the case involved allegations of gangrape of a minor coupled with the recording of the assault and threats of circulation, the court found the high court judgment suffered from serious infirmities.

The counsel for the accused claimed it was a case of a consensual relationship. The court, however, found it wholly untenable in law, particularly because the allegations extended beyond a single accused and involved coercion, intimidation, and multiple perpetrators.

The bench pointed out that the survivor's statements, recorded under Section 183 of the BNSS, read with the medico-legal examination report, prima facie established the commission of the alleged offences.

Directing the accused to surrender within two weeks, the court also noted that the HC failed to apply the settled parameters governing the grant of bail, including the gravity of the offence, the survivor's vulnerability, and the likelihood of witness intimidation, since the accused and the survivor belonged to the same village.

The minor claimed the accused repeatedly established physical relations with her by pointing a locally made firearm at her.

She alleged that his friends, namely Goldi, Amit, Rupak, and Vedansh, used to abuse and molest her and also attempted to establish physical relations.

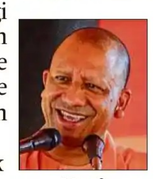
After the bail, the accused continuously threatened and intimidated her, forcing her to drop out of school, her counsel claimed.

The bench pointed out that the apex court had consistently emphasised the need for expeditious disposal of Pocso cases, and had hence directed the trial court to give priority to the present case and pass appropriate orders as expeditiously as possible.

Seers project Yogi Adityanath as PM contender

SANJAY PANDEY
LUCKNOW, DHNS

Seers at the ongoing 'Maagh Mela' (an annual month-long ritual at Sangam in Prayagraj) on Saturday wished Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to become the prime minister in future.



Yogi Adityanath

"We seek the blessings of Mother Ganga to make Yogi Adityanath the prime minister of the country in the future," seer Swami Raghavacharya said while addressing a gathering of the saints at a function. He also said that celebrations were held at Ayodhya, Chitrakoot and other important religious places after Adityanath became the CM.

Another seer, Vaidehi Vallabhacharya, said Adityanth had the capability to not only lead the state but the world.

In their speeches, seers heaped praise on Adityanath for his "devotion and efforts to organise religious events and improve the law and order situation in the state". They also reiterated the pledge not to get divided along caste lines.

Speaking on the occasion, Adityanath lashed out at the Opposition parties for being "silent" on the persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh. "It seems someone has rubbed fevicol (an adhesive) on their (Opposition) mouths... they are not saying a word," he added. He claimed that the Opposition parties always try to divide the Hindus in the name of secularism.

Taking a veiled dig at Congress, he said that attempts were made to defame Sanatana Dharma during the earlier governments.

Want to live in peace with Kukis: Meitei outfit chief

IMPHAL, PTI: Meitei outfit Arambai Tenggol's chief Korou Nganba Khuman on Saturday said he does not view all Kukis as enemies and is keen on peaceful coexistence, but a lasting resolution to the conflict would require addressing concerns over demographic imbalance caused by illegal immigration.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a programme in Imphal, he said Kukis who have been living in Manipur should stay, but illegal immigrants must be identified through mechanisms like the NRC.

"We don't see every Kuki as our enemy. We want to live and coexist peacefully. However, as there are issues related to demographic imbalance, drugs and illegal immigration, there should be a mechanism like the NRC to identify illegal immigrants," he said.

"Definitely, those Kukis who have been living in the state have to and should stay. Illegal immigration is a known fact and not a fiction. For a lasting solution, the problems related to demographic imbalance, drugs and illegal immigrants have to be addressed," he added.

Khuman urged elected representatives to prioritise the interests of the state "before anything else".

Exam candidates to undergo face authentication, says UPSC

NEW DELHI, PTI: All candidates appearing in recruitment examinations conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) will undergo face authentication at venues.

They said it would further strengthen the integrity of the examination process.

The UPSC successfully conducted a pilot program to test an artificial intelligence-enabled facial authentication technology for secure candidate verification during the NDA and NA (Naval Academy) II Examination, 2025.

Mandatory service charge illegal, says Centre

CCPA takes suo motu action against 27 restaurants

AJITH ATHRADY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

The Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution said on Saturday that the mandatory levy of service charge by restaurants violated consumer law.

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA), under the ministry, said the automatic addition of service charges had been declared as an unfair trade practice, and that it invited penalties.

The CCPA had taken suo motu cognisance of 27 restaurants located across the country for violation of consumer rights and adoption of unfair trade practices under Section 2(47) of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, related to the mandatory levy of service charge, said the statement.

The action followed a Delhi High Court judgment, dated March 28, 2025, that upheld the guidelines issued by the CCPA on the levy of service charge.

The court had held that the mandatory collection of service charges by restaurants was contrary to the law, and observed that all restaurant establishments were required to adhere to the CCPA guidelines.

Fully empowered

The court also affirmed that the CCPA was fully empowered to enforce its guidelines in accordance with the law.

The Guidelines to Prevent Unfair Trade Practices and Protection of Consumer Interest with Regard to Levy of Service Charge in Hotels and Restaurants, issued by the CCPA on July 4, 2022, stipulate that no service charge shall be collected by any other name.

It also says that consumers shall not be forced to pay service charges, and must be clearly informed that it is voluntary and optional.

No restriction

"No restriction on entry or provision of services shall be imposed based on refusal to pay service charge, and service charge shall not be added to the bill and subjected to GST," said the CCPA the statement.

"Investigations revealed that several restaurants, including Café Blue Bottle, Patna, and China Gate Restaurant Private Limited (Bora Bora), Mumbai, were automatically levying a 10% service charge by default, in clear violation of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, and the CCPA Guidelines, which have now been upheld by the Delhi High Court," the statement said.

THE RULES

- Consumers shall not be forced to pay service charges
- They must be informed that it is voluntary, optional
- No curb on entry or provision of services shall be imposed based on refusal to pay charge
- Service charge shall not be added to the bill, nor subjected to GST

AVIATION SCARE

Firefighters douse a fire after a nine-seater aircraft made an emergency crash landing at Raghunathpali area near Rourkela in Odisha on Saturday afternoon. At least six people were injured in the incident. PTI

Depression over Bay of Bengal weakens; heavy rain likely in TN

CHENNAI, PTI: A 'deep depression' over the Bay of Bengal has weakened into a 'depression' and is very likely to cross the north Sri Lanka coast on Saturday, the IMD said.

Due to the weather system, "heavy rainfall" is expected at isolated places over Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam, Mayiladuthurai, Pudukkottai, Karaikal, Chengalpattu, Villupuram, Cuddalore, Kallakurichi, Ariyalur and Ramanathapuram districts.

According to the India Meteorological Department's bulletin, the depression was located about 50 km southeast of Mullaittivu, 60 km northeast of Trincomalee and 140 km southeast of Jaffna in Sri Lanka, besides being 250 km southeast of Karaikal and 450 km south-southeast of Chennai.

"It is very likely to continue moving west-northwestwards and cross the north Sri Lanka coast between Trincomalee and Jaffna, close to Mullaittivu, as a depression," it said.

Sea conditions are likely to be very rough over the southwest Bay of Bengal.

BJP working president on tour of poll-bound states

AMRITA MADHUKALYA
NEW DELHI, DHNS

Taking charge quietly behind the scenes, the BJP's new working president, Nitin Nabin, is visiting poll-bound states.

After Assam, Nabin is now on a two-day visit to Tamil Nadu, a state where the BJP is keen to make inroads. He is expected to visit West Bengal next.

With Tamil Nadu being his third state visit since taking charge, BJP sources said his initial mandate was to tour poll-bound states and take stock of organisational affairs.

On his visit to the southern state on Saturday and Sunday, Nabin landed in Coimbatore for a meeting with professionals and then with Shakti Kendra in-charges in the region, followed by one with the party's state-unit core committee.

Nitin Nabin

On Sunday, he is expected to visit the Perur temple as well as the Marudhamalai temple, and then have breakfast at a party worker's house.

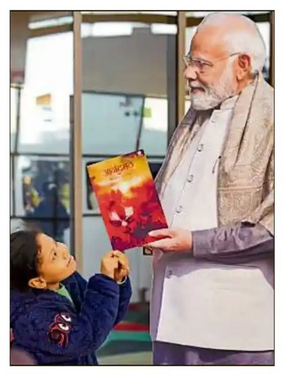
He will also reportedly attend a Pongal function at Vadavalli, and then meet booth presidents, Shakti Kendra incharges, mandal presidents and office-bearers of the Singanallur Assembly segment.

He will attend a meeting on the VB G RAM G Bill at Neelambur as well, before a meal at another party-worker's house.

In Tamil Nadu, the BJP is looking to defeat the DMK-Congress combine by allying with the AIADMK once again.

The furore over the certification for actor and TVK chief Vijay's film "Jana Nayagan" has turned political, putting the BJP in a difficult position.

One of the crucial states for the BJP during this round of elections is Assam, where beloved singer Zubeen Garg's death could have political ramifications in the upcoming polls.



A child with a cutout of Prime Minister Narendra Modi during 'New Delhi World Book Fair' at Bharat Mandapam, in New Delhi, on Saturday. PTI

No jewellery to customers covering face in Varanasi: Traders' body

VARANASI (UP), PTI: Local unit of the Uttar Pradesh Jewellers Association on Saturday imposed a ban on the sale of jewellery to customers wearing a veil, burqa, mask or helmet, citing security reasons.

This decision has been taken in view of the incidents of theft, robbery, and fraud that have occurred in several districts, they claimed.

Kamal Singh, the district president of UPJA here, said, "We will not sell jewellery items to customers whose faces are covered. If a person with a covered face commits a crime, their identity cannot be established. For this, we have put up posters in front of our shops, which state that entry into the shop is prohibited while wearing a mask, burqa, or veil."

Singh said that they only want their own safety. If a customer comes wearing a hijab, they should uncover their face upon entering the shop so that the jewellers can feel safe.

Satya Narayan Seth, president of the UPJA, said that similar posters have been put up in front of jewellers' shops in several districts of the state, including Jhansi.

Seth said that there are thousands of jewellery shops in Varanasi. Everyone is facing problems with people covering their faces. The association is not opposing any person's religion. It is doing this only for jewellers' own safety.

IAS officers call Telugu channel report 'misogynistic', false

S N V SUDHIR
HYDERABAD, DHNS

IAS and IPS officers' associations have strongly condemned a report aired by a Telugu news channel and demanded an immediate apology.

The IAS officers' body described the report — alleging that women IAS officers received "comfort postings" within a short span — as cheap and motivated insinuations.

Such reporting grossly misrepresented established administrative procedures, undermined the credibility of the civil services, and cast baseless aspersions, said the Telangana IAS Officers' Institute.

The allegations were completely malicious and constituted a gross violation of the privacy, dignity, and professional reputation of serving officers, said the IAS officers' body, adding that the broadcast also promoted a deeply regressive and misogynistic narrative targeting women officers.

"The IAS Officers' Association places on record its strongest condemnation of the recent broadcast aired by NTV, wherein false, malicious, and unsubstantiated allegations were made against serving women IAS officer," it said in a statement.

Noting that the news report referred to "alleged phone calls and WhatsApp chats as purported evidence", it said: "These claims are entirely fabricated, defamatory, and devoid of any factual verification. The reckless airing of such content, without authentication or adherence to basic norms of journalistic ethics, amounts to character assassination and harassment of women officers who are discharging their duties with integrity."

The association demanded an immediate and unconditional public apology, withdrawal of the content from all platforms, and for Telugu news channel and all other media houses to refrain from airing, circulating, or amplifying such defamatory material.

Every conflict is born out of security concerns: Doval

KALYAN RAY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

Amid the ongoing global turmoil, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval on Saturday said the conflicts are happening because "some countries" are imposing "their own will" on others using all the powers they have.

"All the struggles and wars going on around the world are because some countries want to impose their own will on others and are using all their power for it," Doval said at the Vikshit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue here.

The NSA's comments come at a time when the world witnesses the capture of the President of Venezuela by the USA in a military operation and the Donald Trump administration threatening to take over Greenland, besides the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict and the crisis in the Middle East.

Doval said every conflict in the world was born out of security concerns.

"Why do conflicts happen?

National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and MoS Youth Affairs and Sports Raksha Khadse in New Delhi on Saturday. PTI

It is not that people are psychopaths and enjoy seeing dead bodies. It is because you want to subjugate the enemy nation to protect yourself and make it agree to your terms. You see any conflict in the world right now, it is about imposing one's terms on the other country for security," he said.

Addressing 3,000 young delegates, he said India didn't attack any country but failed to understand the threats to national security.

Doval said India would need to strengthen itself not just at the borders, but in every other way, including economically, to "avenge" a painful history of attacks and subjugation.

Doval said, "Our villages were burned. Our civilisation was destroyed. Our temples were looted, and we watched helplessly as silent spectators."

"Revenge is not a good word, but it can be a huge force. We have to avenge our history and take this country to the point where it is great again, not just in terms of border security, but also the economy and every aspect," he said.

Maha: BJP names Pocso-accused as councillor, U-turn after backlash

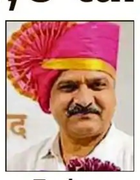
MRITYUNJAY BOSE
MUMBAI, DHNS

In what snowballed into a major political issue, the BJP has appointed Tushar Apte, who was named in the FIR in the sensational Badlapur sexual assault case, a councillor of the Kulgaon-Badlapur Municipal Council (KBMC) in Maharashtra's Thane district.

However, in a dramatic political turnaround, Apte resigned from the KBMC following massive public outrage and direct intervention by the party's state leadership.

Apte was the secretary of the trust that ran the pre-primary school in Badlapur whose janitor, Akshay Shinde (24) was held on August 16, 2024, for sexual assault of two minor girls on August 12-13.

Shinde died during a scuffle with a police escort team in the Mumbra area on September 23, while being escorted from Taloja Jail to Badlapur. His parents, Anna and Alka Shinde, and their lawyer Amit Katarnavare described it as a "fake encounter".



Tushar Apte

Around 1.5 months after the incident, the police arrested the president and secretary of the school management, Uday Kotwal and Tushar Apte, respectively, under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Pocso) Act for allegedly failing to report the minor girls' sexual assault.

As of now, Apte is out on bail, and the case is sub-judice.

KBMC Chairperson Ruchita Ghorpade confirmed Apte's appointment. Defending the decision, BJP councillor Rajan Ghorpade said Apte was a social activist and an office-bearer of a reputed educational institution.

"Though he was named as an accused, his guilt has not been proven. The main accused has already been punished. Apte worked actively for the party and contributed to the party candidate's victory, and therefore, he was given this responsibility," he said.

The Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in the Opposition slammed the BJP and sought answers from Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who is also the state's home minister.

"The Badlapur incident caused unrest in the town for two days. These directors and trustees pressured the police to prevent the girls' complaint from being registered. Later, they absconded, and we thought they were still in jail. However, now they have been given a prominent position," noted Shiv Sena (UBT) Rajya Sabha member and chief spokesperson Sanjay Raut.

In a sharp reaction, NCP (SP) working president Supriya Sule said the BJP had made its priorities clear. "The safety of children and women should be the priority of any government. However, by letting a person accused under the Pocso Act be a co-opted councillor, the BJP has reached the peak of insensitivity," she said.

SERIAL OFFENDER The BJP veteran in fresh row over comments to journalist

Kailash Vijayvargiya's slippery Lakshman Rekha

MILIND GHATWAI

Madhya Pradesh Cabinet minister Kailash Vijayvargiya often draws a Lakshman Rekha for women. The self-appointed custodian of culture advises women not to wear revealing clothes or cross certain limits, indirectly blaming them for inviting unwanted attention.

Days after the brutal 2012 Delhi gangrape, the senior BJP leader had come up with the Lakshman Rekha remark, drawing rebuke not just from political rivals, women, and activists but also his party's high command, which publicly asked him to withdraw his distasteful comments. In an insincere apology, he claimed the remark was meant for everybody, not just women.

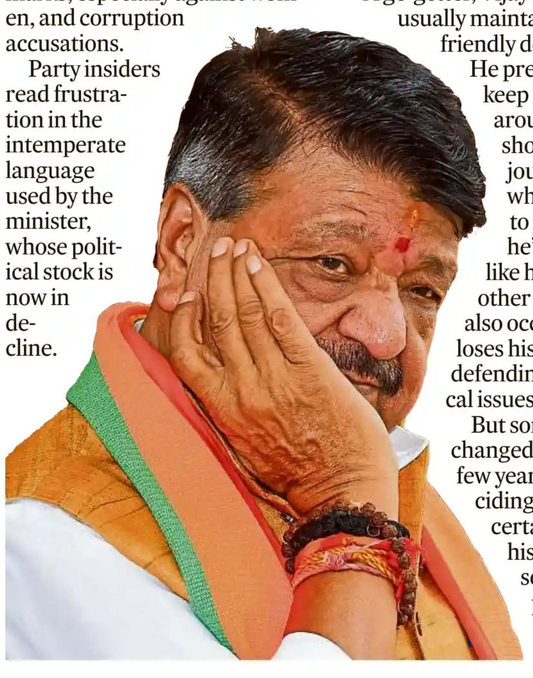
Recently, Vijayvargiya — now the state's urban development minister who also holds the parliamentary affairs portfolio — crossed another line when he flew off the handle while answering persistent queries from a television reporter who sought accountability for deaths caused by contaminated drinking water in Indore. The congested locality where this incident occurred is part of the constituency Vijayvargiya represents in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly.

The video of the angry exchange between the minister and the reporter went viral, turning the spotlight on the tragedy that had taken many lives and left hundreds hospitalised.

Indore, which had been in the headlines for many years for being the cleanest city in the country, found its image sullied in more ways than one. Sensing the damage done by the altercation, Vijayvargiya apologised again. This time, unconditionally.

Precarious position

Once considered close to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the 69-year-old maverick politician has navigated his way through a slew of controversies, usually caused by his off-the-cuff remarks, especially against women, and corruption accusations.



Party insiders read frustration in the intemperate language used by the minister, whose political stock is now in decline.

When Shivraj Singh Chouhan was the chief minister, Vijayvargiya was seen snapping at his heels. He was considered number two in the state politics, and therefore a threat to Chouhan, who helmed the state from 2005-end to 2023, barring a 15-month Congress rule.

A much younger Mohan Yadav succeeded Chouhan, leaving the likes of Vijayvargiya squirming. Many called Yadav, who hails from Ujjain, hardly 35 kms from Indore, a protégé of Vijayvargiya till the high command's unexpected decision changed the power equation.

A go-getter, Vijayvargiya usually maintains a friendly demeanour. He prefers to keep his arms around the shoulders of journalists while talking to them until he's cornered, like he was the other day. He also occasionally loses his cool while defending ideological issues.

But something changed in the last few years, coinciding with uncertainty over his and his son Akash's political future. In the Indore region, his closest party rival was veteran parliamentarian and former Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan. The media loved to call their tussle "Tai (elder sister in Marathi) vs Bhai".

Vijayvargiya did not contest the 2018 Assembly election, knowing well that the party would not field him as well as his son. The junior Vijayvargiya fell from grace after he was caught on camera chasing and hitting a municipal official with a cricket bat. Prime Minister Narendra Modi reportedly censured him, and he was not fielded in the 2023 elections.

Vijayvargiya Sr was not too keen on another electoral battle, but the party forced him and some other seniors in 2023. He expressed displeasure in his typical style, saying he thought he had become an important leader who makes speeches for others, but was surprised to be made to campaign for himself.

Personal flair

Outside Madhya Pradesh, he was once in charge of the party's West Bengal election campaign. A good showing in Haryana and then Bengal had helped him get closer to the national leadership.

Rivals of the former Indore mayor demean him as a showboat for his antics and the issues he chooses to highlight. Once, he targeted a vibrating condom, describing it as an assault on Indian values.

His past rhetoric against indecent television advertisements and double-entendre dialogues had many takers. He successfully campaigned to replace colonial convocation dresses with dhoti-kurta. When a Muslim candidate from the Congress won from Bhopal, he asked how a "beef-eater" achieved victory when a nationalist government was ruling Madhya Pradesh.

He began his political innings in 1975, the year Sholay was released. Not surprisingly, he once compared himself to Thakur, saying he was as helpless as the character. Chouhan was the CM then. During the brief Congress rule under Kamal Nath, he used the "Tera Kya Hoga" dialogue from the iconic movie to warn officials against behaving in a partisan manner.

Around the same time, he warned an official in Indore that he would have set the town on fire but for the presence of RSS office-bearers.

Hailing from a modest background, he makes it a point to sell groceries from an old family shop once a year. It's another matter that, given the wealth and resources he has amassed over the decades, this annual "ritual" is only for the cameras.

Belting out bhajans and Hindi songs in party functions, he fancies himself as a singer. It remains to be seen whether he will face the music for his recent outburst.

(Milind Ghatwai is a Bhopal-based senior journalist)

PM Modi invokes India's civilisational courage in Somnath

VERAVAL, PTI

PM Narendra Modi holds a trident at the Somnath Temple in Gujarat. PTI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday described Somnath as a symbol of "our civilisational courage" as he landed in the famous temple town to attend `Somnath Swabhiman Parv' events.

Starting his three-day visit to Gujarat, he witnessed a drone show and presided over a meeting of the Shree Somnath Trust as its chairman.

"Feeling blessed to be in Somnath, a proud symbol of our civilisational courage. This visit comes during #SomnathSwabhimanParv, when the entire nation has come together to mark a thousand years since the first attack on the Somnath Temple in 1026. Grateful to the people for the warm welcome," the PM said in a post on X after his arrival.

Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel and deputy CM Harsh Sanghavi also attended the meeting.

The prime minister landed at the helipad near the famous Somnath temple earlier in the evening. A large number of people lined the road to greet him as his convoy drove to the circuit house.

After conducting a meeting at the circuit house, Modi headed to the temple where he participated in 'Omkar Mantra' chanting as part of Somnath Swabhiman Parv.

He then witnessed a drone show at the temple premises. Some 3,000 drones created various images depicting historical events associated with the temple in the sky over the Arabian Sea, the release said.

A series of programmes is being held from January 8 to 11.

IN FULL SWING

A CISF contingent during Republic Day parade rehearsals, at Kartavya Path, in New Delhi, on Saturday. PTI

SIR for voter exclusion, not correction: Mamata again writes to CEC

Accuses EC of political bias, high-handedness

KOLKATA, PTI

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday wrote to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, alleging that the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls has been turned into an exercise to exclude voters rather than correct records.

In her third letter to Kumar since the SIR began, Mamata accused the Election Commission of political bias, insensitivity, and high-handedness during the exercise.

"The hearing process has become largely mechanical, driven purely by technical data and completely devoid of the application of mind, sensitivity, and human touch," she wrote in the three-page letter.

She said that the exercise's aim seemed "neither of correction nor of inclusion... but solely of deletion and of exclusion", alleging that the process undermines the democratic and constitutional framework.

At the end of the typed letter, Mamata added a handwritten note, "Though I know you won't reply or clarify. But (it is) my duty to inform you (of) the details."

She claimed that the exercise has led to 77 deaths, four suicide attempts, and 17 hospitalisations, which she attributed to fear, intimidation, and excessive workload.

She said minor spelling or age discrepancies were leading to coercive hearings, harassment, and loss of wages for ordinary people.

Citing her own name as an example, she wrote, "A name may appear as 'Mamta' in one document and 'Mamata' in another, middle name 'Kumar' may inadvertently be recorded as 'Komar' or 'Kumer'. Similarly, as in records, (the) age difference between son/daughter with father/mother may be 18 or 19 years.

Mamata also raised concerns over technical and administrative irregularities, saying that "so-called 'logical discrepancies' are being selectively targeted in some constituencies only with political bias", while a different portal for West Bengal and erratic backend changes were confusing officials.

The chief minister drew attention to the summoning of eminent personalities, including Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, poet Joy Goswami, actor and MP Deepak Adhikari, cricketer Mohammed Shami, and a monk of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha, asking, "Does this not amount to sheer audacity on the part of the ECI?"

"Though it is already very late, hope good sense prevails, and appropriate corrective actions are taken from your end to minimise the harassment, inconvenience, and agony of the common citizen of the state," she said.

EC appoints 4 more special roll observers

The Election Commission on Saturday appointed four more Special Roll Observers (SROs) for West Bengal to strengthen supervision of the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, reports PTI.

Besides SROs, the EC has appointed observers at multiple levels to oversee the SIR exercise.

The appointments will take effect immediately and remain in force until further directions, a notification said.

Malayalam bill: Vijayan rebuts Siddaramaiah's concerns

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PTI

PINARAYI VIJAYAN
Kerala Chief Minister

"Key provisions ensure that no language is imposed and linguistic freedom is fully protected. In notified areas, Tamil and Kannada speakers may continue to use their mother tongues for official correspondence with the Secretariat, Heads of Departments, and local offices.

SIDDARAMAIAH
Karnataka Chief Minister

"They may have passed a law, but it cannot be implemented in that manner. You cannot forcibly impose a language on linguistic minorities... If it becomes law, the situation may force us to launch a protest. An appeal will also be made to the central government and the President.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Saturday said the apprehensions raised regarding the Malayalam Language Bill, 2025 do not reflect the facts.

The CM's statement, on social media platform X, comes a day after his counterpart in Karnataka, Siddaramaiah, wrote to him expressing serious concern over the bill. He had stated that if the bill was passed, Karnataka would oppose it by exercising every constitutional right available, in defence of linguistic minorities and the plural spirit of the country.

A day before that, he had said that "the proposed Malayalam Language Bill-2025, by mandating compulsory Malayalam as the first language even in Kannada-medium schools, strikes at the heart of linguistic freedom and the lived reality of Kerala's border districts, especially Kasaragod".

In wake of these statements, Vijayan said that the Kerala government "remains steadfast in upholding the constitutional values of secularism and pluralism". He said that the bill contains a clear and unambiguous non-obstante clause to safeguard the rights of linguistic minorities, particularly the Kannada and Tamil speaking communities, and attached a photograph of the same.

"Key provisions ensure that no language is imposed and linguistic freedom is fully protected. In notified areas, Tamil and Kannada speakers may continue to use their mother tongues for official correspondence with the Secretariat, Heads of Departments, and local offices, with replies issued in the same languages," he explained.

He further said that students whose mother tongue is not Malayalam are free to choose languages available in schools in accordance with the National Education Curriculum. "Students from other states or foreign countries are not compelled to appear for Malayalam examinations at the IX, X, or Higher Secondary levels."

Vijayan also emphasised that Kerala's language policy is fully aligned with the Official Languages Act, 1963, and Articles 346 and 347 of the Constitution. "Built on the Kerala model of participation and transparency, our government resists any erosion of federal rights while remaining equally committed to protecting the linguistic identity of every citizen," he said.

Kashmiri man detained over namaz attempt at Ram temple

LUCKNOW, DHNS: A man from Kashmir was taken into custody after he allegedly tried to offer namaz inside Ayodhya's Ram Mandir complex on Saturday.

According to sources, Ahmed Sheikh (50), a resident of Shopian district in Kashmir, allegedly tried to offer namaz near the southern boundary of the complex. The man started raising slogans when some locals tried to stop him.

Later, he was detained by the temple's security staff and handed over to the Ram Janmabhoomi police for questioning.

Some Kashmiri youths, who sell woollen clothes, were also detained, sources said. "The man is being interrogated...we are trying to ascertain how he managed to reach the temple," said an official.

Sources said that preliminary investigations revealed that the man was travelling to Ajmer. Some dry fruits were recovered from his possession.

Sources said security in the temple complex was being reviewed in view of the incident.

Stalin bats for state consultations in Caste Census

CHENNAI, DHNS: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Saturday demanded that the Union government constitute a consultative mechanism involving Chief Ministers and representatives of states to discuss and refine the guidelines for caste enumeration and exercise due diligence in designing the framework, to ensure the data's reliability for advancing social justice.

MK Stalin

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Stalin welcomed the inclusion of caste details in the census, as it aligns with the long-standing demand of the Tamil Nadu government for comprehensive, reliable data to address historical inequalities and ensure targeted welfare measures.

Caste enumeration is an exceedingly sensitive matter that touches upon deep-rooted social dynamics, regional variations in caste structures, and the potential for unintended societal tensions if not handled with care, Stalin said.

"The framing of questions and the methodology for data collection must be precise, inclusive, and free from ambiguity to ensure accuracy and public trust. Any shortcomings in these aspects could lead to disputes, inaccuracies, or even exacerbate divisions," he added.

Contending that the outcome of the Census profoundly impacts state-level policies on education, employment, reservations, and welfare schemes, Stalin said it is imperative that Centre consults all states, UTs before finalising the guidelines.

ALLIANCE WATCH

Rahul's Nilgiris visit stays apolitical amid Congress-DMK strain

E T B SIVAPRIYAN
CHENNAI, DHNS

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will be in The Nilgiris on January 13 to attend an event at a private school where he stayed for a day during the Bharat Jodo Yatra. Though the Tamil Nadu assembly elections are just months away, Gandhi's visit to the state does not have any political engagements, amid a visible strain in the ties between the Congress and DMK.

Rahul Gandhi

Sources told *DH* that Gandhi will land from New Delhi at Mysuru airport on January 13 and proceed to Gudalur in the Nilgiris district by a chopper to attend an event organized by the Morning Star Higher Secondary School. He had stayed inside the school premises during his Bharat Jodo Yatra in October 2022 when his entourage made a stop at Gudalur while on their way from Kerala to Karnataka.

"This was a commitment that he made to the school management. He is coming exclusively for the event," a source aware of the developments told *DH*. The source added that Gandhi will not have any political engagements during his visit to Tamil Nadu and said had the alliance between Congress and DMK not gone under strain, the Leader of Opposition would have attended a public meeting or participated in some political event.

A senior TNCC leader told *DH* that the relationship between the two parties is still intact but is undergoing a strain due to a slew of developments from both sides. Gandhi's telephonic conversation with actor-politician Vijay following the death of 41 people at his political rally in September 2025 to express his condolences triggered speculation about the Congress and TVK coming together.

With speculation doing the rounds, DMK President M K Stalin sent his family member to meet Gandhi and AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge seeking a clarity on the alliance following which the Congress constituted a five-member committee to launch seat-sharing talks with the DMK.

Ajit Pawar, Supriya Sule share stage after NCP split

MUMBAI, DHNS: With Pawar-family patriarch and NCP founder Sharad Pawar's photo with folded hands behind them, cousins Ajit Pawar and Supriya Sule shared a political platform in Pune for the first time since the acrimonious split of June-July 2023.

Supriya Sule

Ajit Pawar

This development is being seen as the first step towards a possible reunification of the two parties.

Sharad Pawar's nephew Ajit Pawar, the Maharashtra deputy chief minister and NCP president, and daughter and NCP (SP) working president Supriya Sule, released a joint manifesto for Pune on Saturday.

The two parties — on different sides of India's larger political spectrum — are jointly contesting the elections to the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) and the Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC), which are scheduled for January 15.

The Pawar family, which hails from Baramati, holds significant influence in the Pune district.

The apparent truce in Pune by the two NCP factions signals a major turn in Maharashtra politics.

The NCP and the NCP (SP) have come together in Pune to hold on to the family fort. The move is also aimed at avoiding any benefit going to the BJP, which is eyeing a second consecutive term at the Pune civic body.

ONGC controls blowout at Andhra well after 5 days

HYDERABAD, DHNS: After five days of blowout control operations at Well Mori-5 in Andhra Pradesh's Konaseema region, the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) successfully established well control and completed the capping operation on Saturday.

The Mori-5 well experienced a blowout on January 5 during service operations by PEC contractor M/s Deep Industries Limited.

The gas leak triggered a massive fire, sparking panic. ONGC deployed its specialised manpower and equipment for rapid and safe containment.

No fatalities were reported, and firm maintained that safety and environmental protection were prioritised.

NATION ON EDGE Economic despair is driving country's most serious upheaval in years

Growing unrest risks deepening crisis for Iran's Islamic regime

BLOOMBERG

On Thursday night, 35-year-old Sara took to the streets of Tehran for the first time in three years to protest against the Islamic Republic.

In late 2022, she had been part of an uprising against Iranian authorities' violent enforcement of female dress codes, which ended with significant government concessions but no change to the law. It feels different this time, she said, because Tehran's Grand Bazaar — a symbol of conservative support for the government — has been on strike for nearly two weeks, emboldening others to join what has become the greatest challenge in a generation to a regime that is arguably weaker than ever.

"It's no longer about hunger or food, it's beyond that," Sara said late on Thursday, hours before authorities blocked the internet. "People are out everywhere — small towns and places in Iran that I've never even heard of."The latest unrest gripping Iran began on December 28, when traders in the labyrinthine bazaar protested the government's failure to manage a currency crisis that has seen inflation soar, leaving many of the country's 90 million citizens unable to afford even basic goods. It has since spread to every corner of the country. From Mashhad in the northeast to Abadan in the southwest, Iranians are revolting against a system that has isolated them from the world, shattered their economy, poured billions into hazardous regional policies and prioritised a nuclear programme that ultimately led to Israeli-US airstrikes last summer.

The government's response so far has been to offer a monthly cash handout of $7 and promise to curb price gouging and the exploitation of the exchange-rate system by wealthy, well-connected elites. To many, it feels like a paltry effort in the face of the sheer breadth of crises confronting the country. "It's as though there's no government at work," said Saeed Laylaz, a former economic adviser to reformist ex-president Mohammad Khatami. Videos posted to social media late on Thursday appeared to show hundreds of people gathered at major intersections and thoroughfares in Tehran. Others showed large crowds cheering as a branch of the state broadcaster in the central city of Isfahan was set ablaze. In a sign of how widespread the anger has become, Reza Pahlavi — the exiled son of the Shah of Iran, deposed in the 1979 revolution — has emerged as a unifying figure. His statements supporting protesters appear to have given the movement momentum.

The Pahlavi family was ousted in an Islamist uprising that was an angry rebuke of a modernising but autocratic monarchy. Yet the Islamic Republic that followed proved just as authoritarian, with a religious constitution that dramatically curtailed minority and women's rights and persecuted thousands. A cold war with the US, mass executions and a prolonged conflict with Iraq set the tone for the decades that followed.

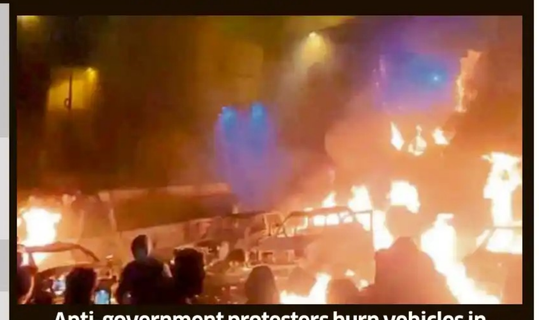
Successive waves of protests — growing larger and deadlier since the 2019 petrol riots — have tested public patience with a government whose response has consistently been to double down and suppress dissent through fear and violence, rather than deliver meaningful reform. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps signalled on Friday that it is likely to follow the same approach this time. Earlier, a Tehran prosecutor warned that "rioters" who damage public property would face the death penalty. Still, demonstrators say security forces appear less numerous than during previous protests, potentially signalling reluctance by the regime to provoke further anger at such a perilous moment for 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Iran's security and defence doctrine — which shaped Middle East geopolitics for decades — has been badly weakened since Israel bombed Tehran's armed allies, Hezbollah and Hamas. Israel's June war on Iran, which culminated in the US bombing key nuclear facilities, has left Iranian leaders on edge over the risk of further attacks. US President Donald Trump on Thursday repeated his recent threats against the regime. Iranian oil exports have dropped sharply over the past decade due to US sanctions. The currency has plunged to record lows, investment in critical infrastructure has dried up and the economy has lagged far behind regional peers. The recent fall in oil prices has only deepened the strain.

In the year to June, prices of basic household items such as chicken and bread rose by an average of 53%, according to the Statistical Center of Iran.

How protests unfolded in Iran

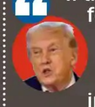
- **Dec 28, 2025:** Protests erupt in Tehran's major markets after the rial plunges to a record low of 1.42 million to the US dollar, driving up food prices and inflation.
- **Dec 29:** Central Bank chief Mohammad Reza Farzin resigns as protests spread beyond Tehran. Police fire tear gas to disperse crowds in Tehran.
- **Dec 30–31:** Demonstrations expand to cities and university campuses.
- **Jan 1, 2026:** Authorities confirm the first protest-related deaths, reporting at least seven fatalities.



Anti-government protesters burn vehicles in Tehran. REUTERS FILE

- **Jan 2–3:** US President Donald Trump warns Iran against killing peaceful protesters. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei says "rioters must be put in their place". Protests spread to over 170 locations across 25 provinces.
- **Jan 6:** Security forces disperse a sit-in at Tehran's Grand Bazaar using tear gas.
- **Jan 8–9:** Overnight protests follow a call by exiled crown prince Reza Pahlavi. Authorities block the internet and international calls. HRANA reports 62 deaths and over 2,300 arrests.
- **Jan 10:** Iran's Revolutionary Guards said safeguarding security is a "red line" and vowed to protect public property.

Your presence in the streets across Iran was a tooth-shattering response to the threats of the traitor and criminal leader of the Islamic Republic...I am preparing to return to my homeland to be beside you.
-**Reza Pahlavi,** Son of Iran's ousted Shah



If they (Iranian forces) start killing people as they have in the past, we will get involved. We will be hitting them very hard where it hurts.
- **Donald Trump,** US President

Protesters are ruining their own streets in order to please the President of the United States... because he said that he would come to their aid. The Islamic Republic will not back down in the face of saboteurs and foreign interference.
- **Ayatollah Ali Khamenei,** Iran's Supreme Leader

Iranian officials signal tougher crackdown as protests escalate

DUBAI, REUTERS: Iran's authorities indicated on Saturday that they could intensify their crackdown on the biggest anti-government demonstrations in years, with the Revolutionary Guards blaming the unrest on terrorists and vowing to safeguard the governing system.

A day after United States President Donald Trump issued a new warning that the United States could intervene, there were fresh reports of violence across the country, although an internet blackout made it difficult to assess the full extent of the protests.

The exiled son of Iran's last shah, who has emerged as a prominent voice in the fragmented opposition, made his strongest call yet for the protests to broaden into a revolt to topple the clerical rulers. State media said a municipal building had been set on fire in Karaj, west of Tehran, and blamed "rioters".

State TV broadcast footage of funerals for members of the security forces it said were killed during protests in the cities of Shiraz, Qom and Hamedan.

Footage posted on social media showed large crowds gathered in Tehran and fires lit in the streets at night.

In a video showing a nighttime protest in Tehran's Saadatabad district, a man is heard saying the crowd had taken over the area.

"The crowd is coming. 'Death to the dictator', 'Death to Khamenei'," he said, referring to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

WORLD AT A GLANCE

Rescuers continue search operations after a landslide at a landfill in Cebu City on Saturday. At least six people have been declared dead. AFP

Greenland leaders firmly reject Trump's push for US takeover

▸ Greenland's party leaders have rejected President Donald Trump's repeated calls for the US to take control of the island, saying that Greenland's future must be decided by its people, AP/PTI reports from Nuuk (Greenland).

"We don't want to be Americans, we don't want to be Danes, we want to be Greenlanders," Greenland Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen and four party leaders said in a statement Friday night. Trump reiterated on Friday that he would like to make a deal to acquire Greenland, a semi-autonomous region that's part of NATO ally Denmark, "the easy way." He said that if the US doesn't own it, then Russia or China will take it over, and the US does not want them as neighbours. "If we don't do it the easy way, we're going to do it the hard way," Trump said, without explaining what that entailed. The White House said it is considering a range of options, including using force, to acquire the island. Greenland's party leaders reiterated that "Greenland's future must be decided by the Greenlandic people." "As Greenlandic party leaders, we would like to emphasise once again our wish that the US' contempt for our country ends," the statement said.

6 killed in US shooting; suspect held

▸ Authorities say a person was in custody on Saturday after six people were killed in a series of related shootings in eastern Mississippi, AP/PTI reports from West Point.

Clay County Sheriff Eddie Scott said in a Facebook post that "multiple innocent lives" were lost due to violence in the town of West Point, near the Alabama border. The sheriff told WTVA that six people were killed in three locations. A suspect was in custody and there was no threat to the community, the sheriff wrote on Facebook. "I ask that you lift our victims and their families in your prayers Law Enforcement is busy investigating and will release an update as soon as possible," he wrote. The sheriff's office did not provide further details, but planned an update later.

Devotees wearing Zangbeto masks perform as they take part in the celebration of the annual voodoo festival "Vodun Days" in Ouidah, Benin, on Saturday. REUTERS

N Korea warns Seoul over drones

▸ North Korea's military accused South Korea of flying drones across the border between the nations this week, warning Saturday that South Korea will face consequences for its "unpardonable hysteria", AP/PTI reports from Seoul.

South Korea quickly denied the accusation. But the development is likely to further dim prospects for efforts by South Korea's liberal government to restore ties with North Korea. North Korean forces used special electronic warfare assets on Sunday to bring down a South Korean drone flying over North Korea's border town. The drone was equipped with two cameras that filmed unspecified areas, the General Staff of the North's Korean People's Army said in a statement carried by state media.

Superman comics sold for $15 mn

▸ A copy of the comic book that introduced the world to Superman in 1938 has been sold to a collector for $15 million, reports NYT News Service.

The private sale of a high-grade copy of Action Comics No. 1 was announced on Friday. Fewer than 100 copies are known to exist, said Vincent Zurzolo, president of Metropolis Collectibles and ComicConnect, which negotiated the sale. The sale price makes the issue one of the most expensive comics ever sold. The auction record remains with Superman No 1, from 1939, which sold for $9.12 million in November. "This is the advent of the golden age of comics, and Action Comics No 1 is the holy grail of holy grails," Zurzolo said.

Trump promises oil executives 'total safety' in Venezuela

US Prez pitches for swift investment of $100 billion

WASHINGTON, AP/PTI

US President Donald Trump attends a meeting with oil industry executives in Washington DC on Friday. REUTERS

President Donald Trump on Friday called on oil executives to rush back into Venezuela as the White House looks to quickly secure $100 billion in investments to revive the country's ability to fully tap into its expansive reserves of petroleum.

Since the US military raid to capture former Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro on Saturday, Trump has quickly pivoted to portraying the move as a newfound economic opportunity for the US, seizing tankers carrying Venezuelan oil, and saying the US is taking over the sales of 30 million to 50 million barrels of previously sanctioned Venezuelan oil and will be controlling sales worldwide indefinitely.

Trump, as he opened the meeting with oil industry executives, sought to assure them that they need not be sceptical of quickly investing in and, in some cases, returning to the South American country with a history of state asset seizures, as well as ongoing US sanctions and the current political uncertainty.

"You have total safety," Trump told the executives. "You're dealing with us directly and not dealing with Venezuela at all. We don't want you to deal with Venezuela."

Trump added: "Our giant oil companies will be spending at least $100 billion of their money, not the government's money. They don't need government money. But they need government protection."

Pak, US begin anti-terrorism military drill

KARACHI/ISLAMABAD, PTI: Pakistan and the US are holding two-week-long joint anti-terrorism exercises at a counter terrorism centre in the Punjab province of the country, it was announced on Saturday.

The 13th Pakistan-United States bilateral joint exercise, 'Inspired Gambit–2026', began on Friday, the military's media wing said in a statement.

The manoeuvres are taking place at the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) in Pabbi town of the Kharian district, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said. The NCTC serves as a key facility for joint anti-terrorism exercises by Pakistan with international partners like China and the US.

The exercise is being conducted in the Counter Terrorism domain, involving contingents from the armies of Pakistan and the US.

US judge to block Trump's bid to end protections for green card families

BOSTON, AP/PTI: A federal judge has said that she expects to temporarily block efforts by the Trump administration to end a programme that offered temporary legal protections for more than 10,000 family members of citizens and green card holders.

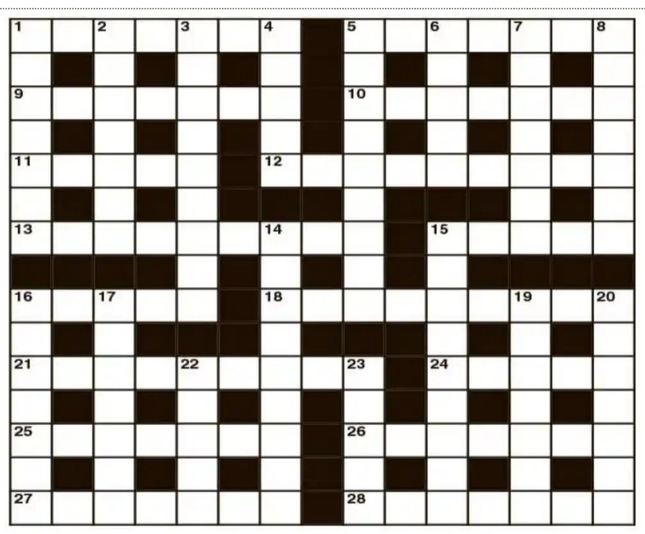
US District Judge Indira Talwani said at a hearing that she planned to issue a temporary restraining order, but did not say when it would be issued. This case is part of a broader effort by the administration to end temporary legal protection for numerous groups and comes just over a week since another judge ruled that hundreds of people from South Sudan may live and work in the US.

"The government, having invited people to apply, is now laying traps between those people and getting the green card," Justin Cox, an attorney who works with Justice Action Center said.

This case involved a programme called Family Reunification Parole, or FRP, and impacts people from Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti and Honduras. Most of them are set to lose their legal protections, which were put in place during the Biden administration, by January 14. The Department of Homeland Security terminated protections late last year.

The case involves five plaintiffs but lawyers are seeking to have any ruling cover everyone that is part of the programme. "Although in a temporary status, these parolees did not come temporarily; they came to get a jump-start on their new lives in the US, typically bringing immediate family members with them," plaintiffs wrote in their motion.

◆ SUNDAY CROSSWORD CHALLENGE 2662 ◆



ACROSS
1 Questionable (7)
5 Put in place ready for use (7)
9 City buried by volcanic ash 79 AD (7)
10 Instruction (7)
11 Well groomed (5)
12 Reassure (3,2,4)
13 Through and through (2,3,4)
15 Unexpected source of delight (5)
16 Ignominy (5)
18 Relaxed in manner (9)
21 Pain-relieving drug (9)
24 South Pacific islands kingdom (5)
25 Enthusiastic (7)
26 Rational (7)
27 Deferential esteem (7)
28 Rashly impetuous person (7)

DOWN
1 Down payment (7)
2 Extravagant language (7)
3 Yonder (4,5)
4 Use meagre amount of (5)
5 Torn to shreds (2,7)
6 Author of Gulliver's Travels (5)
7 Inspire (7)
8 Merciful (7)
14 Inadvertent mistake (9)
15 Closely united in friendship (5-4)
16 Self-important demeanour (7)
17 Perplexed (2,1,4)
19 Dishonourable (7)
20 Permission to proceed (2-5)
22 Wiliness (5)
23 A concealed disadvantage (5)

SOLUTIONS TO CROSSWORD 4022

CRYPTIC
ACROSS: 8, Sh-allow 9, Not at home 13, A-r-row 14, Aitch 15, Bananas 16, P-recede 17, Alone (a loan) 18, (s)Addle 20, Rocks 22, Engage 23, S-ought 25, C-ott-age 27, Lead's on 30, Figure 31, Agency 32, Clear 35, Lod-ge(t) 36, Ar-OS-e 37, Not half 39, E-mended 41, A-ndes 42, H-our-s 43, Slowing up 44, Flannel.
DOWN: 1, Charge 2, F-lawless 3, Solar energy 4, Go through 5, Marbles 6, Think aloud 7, O-men 10, H-am-p-er 11, St-range 12, Assert (a cert) 19, Dog-gone 21, C-logged 24, Deny oneself 26, Turned down 28, Ignoramus 29, Int-end-s 30, F-alter 32, Catching 33, Re-fuse 34, Pa-dding 38, Am-us-ed 40, (T)Ell-a.

EASY
ACROSS: 8, Cohabit 9, Otherwise 13, Lasso 14, Droll 15, Precise 16, Deposit 17, Talon 18, Hives 20, Steel 22, Carafe 23, Famous 25, Tractor 27, Fir tree 30, Attend 31, Behead 32, Vital 35, Cacti 36, Stiff 37, Hirsute 39, Pioneer 41, Rumba 42, Arena 43, Lubricate 44, Tedious.
DOWN: 1, Gossip 2, Carousel 3, Lie detector 4, Still life 5, Respond 6, Sweetheart 7, Asti 10, Slides 11, Pottery 12, Census 19, Violent 21, Erratic 24, Windcheater 26, Centimetre 28, Denigrate 29, Perfume 30, Accept 32, Verbatim 33, Leeway 34, Ostrich 38, Useful 40, Onus.

SU DO KU X - 3793

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		1	5		4			
8	3							
						7	4	
	7						5	
5		9				1		

SOLUTION TO 3792

2	6	5	4	7	3	9	8	1
9	4	3	5	1	8	7	6	2
8	1	7	6	2	9	3	5	4
3	5	9	1	4	2	6	7	8
6	8	1	9	5	7	2	4	3
4	7	2	8	3	6	1	9	5
1	3	4	7	9	5	8	2	6
5	9	8	2	6	1	4	3	7
7	2	6	3	8	4	5	1	9

To solve the puzzle:
The objective is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column, each 3x3 box and each shaded diagonal line contains the same number only once.

BIG CHALLENGE Once occupied by Bradman, Dravid, Ponting and others, the spot has been bereft of quality recently

NO. 3 POSITION but NO. 1 PROBLEM in Test cricket

MADHU JAWALI
BENGALURU, DHNS

Opening an innings in Test cricket is often called the toughest job for a batter, but batting at No. 3 is no less demanding. The role comes with its own set of challenges, where skill is essential but temperament is just as important. A No. 3 batter has to think like an opener and a middle-order player at the same time. He might walk out to face the second ball of the innings, or he could spend hours waiting in the dressing room before getting a chance to bat. Staying mentally ready for both scenarios is what makes the position so unique and so difficult.

It is no coincidence that many of the game's greatest batters made this spot their own. From Don Bradman and Ian Chappell to more modern greats like Rahul Dravid, Ricky Ponting, Kumar Sangakkara, Younis Khan and Hashim Amla, No. 3 has long been home to cricketing royalty. In more recent times, Cheteshwar Pujara carried forward Dravid's legacy with distinction, while Kane Williamson stands out as the last of that elite group still going strong.

These players did more than just occupy a slot in the batting order. Their performances often made them the best batters in their respective teams. While most of them scored the bulk of their Test runs at No. 3, there was no single template for success. Dravid was known for wearing attacks down with patience and discipline, whereas Ponting and Sangakkara combined flair with control, attacking without crossing the line into recklessness.

Different as their styles were, their mindset rarely wavered. They were calm under pressure and unshaken by early setbacks. Whether it was steadying the ship after a quick wicket or pushing the advantage after a strong start, these batters frequently shaped the direction of a Test match.

In recent years, though, the standard at No. 3 has noticeably dipped. Apart from Williamson, it is hard to point to many batters who held the position with consistency across teams last year. The numbers tell a sobering story. (see the table)

England's Ollie Pope was eventually dropped for the final two Ashes Tests after a string of low scores. Australia's Marnus Labuschagne has managed to hold on largely because there are few obvious alternatives.

India, meanwhile, are still searching for clarity over who will bat at No. 3. New Zealand remain fortunate to have Williamson, while South Africa have experimented with Wiaan Mulder and Tristan Stubbs with promising results.

Stubbs, who first made his name in T20 cricket, has shown signs that he could grow into a long-term Test option. England's Jacob Bethell has done something similar, announcing himself with a superb century at No. 3 in the final Ashes Test in Sydney. Both youngsters are in high demand on the franchise circuit, and whether they can sustain their Test ambitions over time remains to be seen. Overall, though, the picture is far from reassuring.

Kumar Sangakkara

Ricky Ponting

Former India batter WV Raman believes the roots of the problem lie in how players are developed at the age-group level.

"The one major difference between the cricketers of earlier generations and now is that in those days, they prepared you and made you play matches, which means they made you develop your technical skills, have a solid foundation and then go and play matches. These days, you play and then develop as you are playing," he tells DHoS.

"So it's like going well-prepared for a theoretical examination to attending without preparations the objective type examinations, where you get multiple choices, you take one hit or miss it. So that's how this is, a modern day trend."

T20 cricket is often blamed for the decline, but Raman feels the issue is more complex.

"We talk about it, but the fact of the matter is that you cannot escape a player looking to play aggressively because, let's face it, that's what they're brought up on," he explains. "In the last decade or so, there have been leagues cropping up all over the place, and it's also lucrative.

"The other factor is that, at the end of the day, however good you are, only 15 players can represent the national side at a time. That means cricketers have to figure out where they can realistically find a slot and make a living from the game.

"All those considerations come into play. You can't expect players to chase something they might never catch. Some may realise that playing for the country is unlikely, so they look elsewhere. In leagues around the world, there are more teams and more opportunities. Being one of 120 players in a league squad is very different from fighting for one of 15 national spots. Naturally, players weigh those odds."

It is a compelling argument, but does that mean the decline is irreversible? Raman believes there is still room for course correction, though responsibility does not rest on players alone.

"It's a case of how the individual feels about it and how he wants to play the game," Raman says. "This is absolutely personal. There shouldn't be compulsion, because once a player finishes his career, he still has to live his life comfortably.

"The prime of his life is spent playing cricket, so he has to feel that the decision to devote his youth to the game was worth it. It's like any job where you think about long-term security. Sport is risky. One injury and you're out, and suddenly there's no safety net."

For years, Test cricket has been romanticised while the shorter formats were looked at with suspicion. First it was ODIs, now T20Is, often labelled as the enemy. A subtle divide has emerged where red-ball specialists are celebrated and white-ball players are sometimes dismissed as mercenaries.

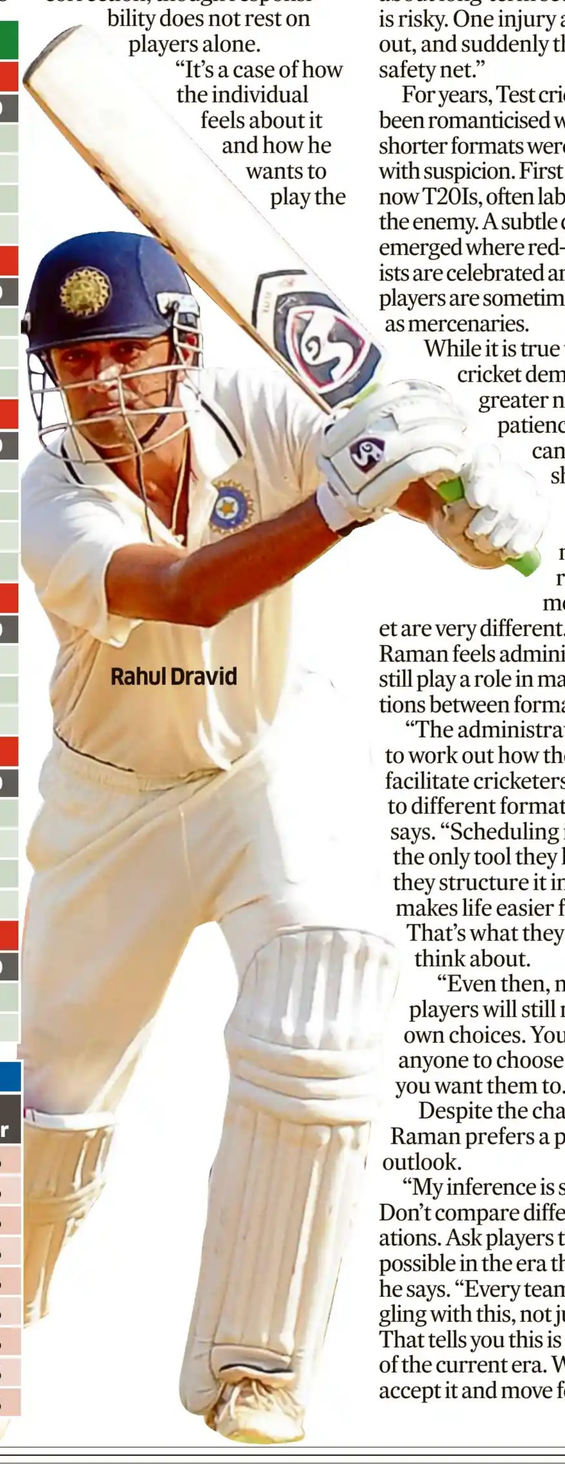
While it is true that Test cricket demands greater nuance and patience, players cannot and should not be forced into a particular mould. The realities of modern cricket are very different. That said, Raman feels administrators can still play a role in making transitions between formats easier.

"The administrators have to work out how they can facilitate cricketers adapting to different formats," he says. "Scheduling is really the only tool they have. Can they structure it in a way that makes life easier for players? That's what they need to think about.

"Even then, many players will still make their own choices. You can't force anyone to choose the path you want them to."

Despite the challenges, Raman prefers a pragmatic outlook.

"My inference is simple. Don't compare different generations. Ask players to do what is possible in the era they play in," he says. "Every team is struggling with this, not just one. That tells you this is the reality of the current era. We have to accept it and move forward."


Rahul Dravid

Performance at No. 3 in Tests in 2025

For AUSTRALIA

Player	Mat	Runs	HS	Ave	SR	100	50
M Labuschagne	8	263	65	26.30	61.44	0	2
C Green	4	188	52	23.50	46.19	0	1
S Smith	1	17	17	17.00	34.69	0	0
J Weatherald	1	5	5	5.00	33.33	0	0

For ENGLAND

Player	Mat	Runs	HS	Ave	SR	100	50
O Pope	9	602	171	37.62	68.56	2	1
J Bethell	2	153	142*	76.50	58.84	1	0
B Carse	1	6	6	6.00	75.00	0	0

For INDIA

Player	Mat	Runs	HS	Ave	SR	100	50
B Sai Sudharsan	6	302	87	27.45	38.71	0	2
K Nair	2	111	40	27.75	58.11	0	0
W Sundar	1	60	31	30.00	34.48	0	0
Shubman Gill	1	33	20	16.50	41.77	0	0

For NEW ZEALAND

Player	Mat	Runs	HS	Ave	SR	100	50
K Williamson	3	154	52	51.33	68.44	0	1
J Duffy	2	53	36	26.50	66.25	0	0
H Nicholls	1	38	34	38.00	65.51	0	0

For PAKISTAN

Player	Mat	Runs	HS	Ave	SR	100	50
Shan Masood	2	170	87	42.50	49.27	0	2
Babar Azam	2	45	31	11.25	43.68	0	0
Khurram Shahzad	1	18	18	18.00	38.29	0	0
Kamran Ghulam	1	12	12	12.00	70.58	0	0

For SOUTH AFRICA

Player	Mat	Runs	HS	Ave	SR	100	50
W Mulder	6	621	367*	69.00	75.36	2	0
T Stubbs	2	219	94	54.75	43.71	0	2

TOP PERFORMANCE AT #3 IN THE LAST THREE DECADES

Name	Teams	Inns	Runs	Avg	100s	50s	% Career
K Sangakkara	SL	207	11679	60.83	37	50	94.2%
R Dravid	Ind	219	10524	52.88	28	50	79.2%
R Ponting	Aus	196	9904	56.27	32	43	74.0%
K Williamson	NZ	171	8812	57.59	31	35	93.1%
H Amla	SA	174	7993	49.96	25	37	86.1%
C Pujara	Ind	155	6529	44.41	18	32	90.7%
Azhar Ali	Pak	132	5342	42.73	15	28	74.8%
Younis Khan	Pak	83	4055	51.33	13	12	40.2%
B Lara	WI	66	3749	60.47	9	13	31.4%

Compiled by Arun Gopalakrishnan

Macclesfield stun Palace

LONDON, AFP: Holders Crystal Palace succumbed to the biggest shock in FA Cup history with a 2-1 defeat at sixth-tier Macclesfield on Saturday as Antoine Semenyo started his Manchester City career by scoring in a 10-1 rout of Exeter.

Captain Paul Dawson and Isaac Buckley-Ricketts scored either side of half-time for the side managed by John Rooney, the younger brother of former England captain Wayne Rooney, at Moss Rose.

Arrived for main event

KOLKATA SELECTIONS

Arrived, from the stables of Adhirajsingh Jodha and to be ridden by Antony Raj, is fancied to win the Calcutta Derby Stakes, the premier event of the Calcutta races to be run over a distance of mile and a half at the races on Sunday.

The first race starts at 12:00 pm.

1. Alvarada Cup - 1400M: The Presence 1, Godsend Divine 2, Cupid's Way 3.
2. Desert God Cup - 2400M: Vivaldi 1, Multiverse 2, Cascade 3.
3. Aslam Kader Memorial Cup - 1600M: Aeropoli 1, Golden Glow 2, Curi 3.
4. Hall Of Famer Cup (Div I) - 1200M: Aperol 1, Princess Peach 2, Aarini 3.
5. Hall Of Famer Cup (Div II) - 1200M: Oishika 1, Superlative 2, Lavish Girl 3.
6. Perin Dalal Alakonda Stakes - 1200M: Silver Dream 1, Tetsu 2, Far Superior 3.
7. Hyderabad Race Club Cup - 1400M: Misty 1, Bharat 2, Glorious King 3.
8. Calcutta Derby Stakes - 2400M: Arrived 1, Super Star 2. Star Studded 3.
9. Black Pearl Cup (Div I) - 1400M: Contessina 1, Queen Of Mafia 2, Amaze And Inspire 3.
10. Black Pearl Cup (Div II) - 1400M: Noorie 1, Cashmere Silk 2, Cristaldo 3.
Day's best: Vivaldi. **Jackpot:** 6, 7, 8, 9 & 10. **I treble:** 2, 3 & 4. **II treble:** 5, 6 & 7. **III treble:** 8, 9 & 10.

FOOTBALL SUPER CUP FINAL

Spotlight on Alonso's future

Steady Madrid take on great Spanish rivals Barcelona today in Jeddah

JEDDAH, SAUDI ARABIA, AFP

Xabi Alonso has steadied Real Madrid's ship in recent weeks after a tumultuous period but the Spanish Super Cup Clasico final against Barcelona on Sunday seems a make-or-break moment for the Spanish coach.

On the brink of the sack after a dire run of form, Alonso responded by leading Madrid to five consecutive victories, the fifth coming on Thursday against Atletico Madrid in the semifinals.

For Real Madrid coach Xabi Alonso (second from right), Sunday's Super Cup Clasico final against Barcelona could be a make-or-break outcome. AFP

Beating Super Cup holders Barcelona, who trounced Madrid 5-2 in last year's final, would bring Alonso a first trophy at the helm.

A second victory in two matches against Barcelona would buy Alonso time and breathing room.

Succumbing to Hansi Flick's side would give Real president Florentino Perez further excuse to oust a coach he hired in June but has has never appeared convinced by.

Spanish media reported Perez was set to sack Alonso if the team lost against Manchester City in the Champions League on December 10, which they did, but the team's improved performance bought the coach another chance..

Mbappe back

Alonso is boosted by the return of French superstar Kylian Mbappe after he missed the 2-1 win over Atletico and Sunday's 5-1 thrashing of Real Betis in La Liga while recovering from a knee sprain.

The coach said Mbappe has as much chance of starting against Barcelona as anyone else and is confident the forward has recovered, even though he was expected to miss another week.

Bengaluru rider Varun seals championship

BENGALURU, DHNS: Two Hyderabad riders -- Rahil Pillarisetty (RACR Castrol Power1) and Rajender Beedani (MAI Racing) -- ended a long wait for title as both sealed the championship in their respective categories with a race to spare in the fifth and final round of the MRF MMSC FMSCI Indian National Motorcycle Racing Championship at the Madras International Circuit, in Chennai on Saturday.

To also seal the championship today was Bengaluru's Varun Patil **(in pic)** (Mad Rabbit Racing) in the Stock 301-400cc category while Raj Kumar (Motul Sparks Racing) from Coimbatore moved within one point of claiming the title in the SuperStock Intermediate 165cc category after surviving a close battle with team-mate Md Samrul Zubair (Hyderabad).

The results (Provisional - all 6 laps): National Championship - Pro-Stock 301-400cc Open: Rahil Pillarisetty (Hyderabad, RACR Castrol Power 1) (11mins, 02.369secs), 1; Sarthak Chavan (Pune, Petronas TVS Racing) (11:02.661), 2; Rakshith Dave (Chennai, Petronas TVS Racing) (11:05.699), 3.

SuperStock Intermediate 165cc (3 laps): Raj Kumar (Coimbatore, Motul Sparks Racing) (06:26.315), 1; Mohamed Samrul Zubair (Hyderabad, Motul Sparks Racing) (06:26.732), 2; Annish Samson (Bengaluru, Speed Up Racing) (06:30.178), 3.

Stock 301-400cc (Novice): Jagadeesh Nagaraj (Bengaluru, Motul Sparks Racing) (12:14.385), 1; Kamal Navas (Chennai, Team Rockers Racing) (12:15.089), 2; Shyam Sundar (Tiruvallur, KYT Helmet ISBK Racing) (12:16.165), 3.

Stock 165cc (Novice): Rajender Beedani (Hyderabad, MAI Racing) (12:56.975), 1; Hari Haran R (Coimbatore, RACR Castrol Power 1) (12:57.148), 2; Vignesh Pothu (Mancherial, MAI Racing) (12:58.358), 3.

Girls (Stock 165cc, 5 laps): Ann Jennifer (Chennai, Motul Sparks Racing) (10:51.606), 1; Saimah Ajaz Baig (Pune, KYT Helmet ISBK Racing) (10:57.502), 2; Jagathishree Kumaresan (Chennai, One Racing) (10:58.022), 3.

So in sole lead; Erigaisi, Nihal close behind

KOLKATA, PTI: American Grandmaster Wesley So emerged sole leader with seven points while star Indian player Arjun Erigaisi was just half a point behind in the 'Open' category of the Tata Steel Chess India Blitz tournament here on Saturday.

On the opening day of the Blitz contest, Erigaisi started with a slice of luck as his opponent, former World Rapid champion Volodar Murzin walked into a forced mate.

After nine rounds, So led with 7 points out of 9, with Erigaisi close behind and Nihal Sarin in third place with 5.5 points.

The women's section, saw American International Master Carissa Yip surge to a perfect 4 out of 4 before being halted by India's Vantika Agrawal in Round 5.

Jockey Vivek-ridden Fynbos wins Villoo C Poonawalla Indian Oaks

MUMBAI RESULTS

Pesi Shroff-trained Fynbos, ridden by G Vivek, justified the favoritism to win the Villoo C Poonawalla Indian Oaks, the feature event of the Mumbai races on Saturday.

1. Isn't She Special Trophy - 1600M: Break Point (Vijay B Shirke) David Allan 1; Break Point (Akshay Kumar) 2; Miracle Of Hanukha (Trevor Patel) 3; Treasure Gold (A Omkar) 4; Wb: 1/2, 3/4, 1-3/4L. T: 1:35.87. TB: MK Jadhav. Fav: Break Point.
2. Potential Champion Trophy - 1600M: Pride's Prince (Sudendu Shah) Yash Narredu 1. El Greco (G Vivek) 2; Chagall (Siddharth) 3; Shubankar (Akshay Kumar) 4; Wb: Shd, 1-1/2, 14-1/2L. T: 1:34.41. TB: Imtiaz Sait. Fav: Pride's Prince.
3. Pleasure Hunt Trophy - 1000M: Fontana (Ms Ameeta Merha) Ajinkya 1; Experanza (Ramswarup) 2; Social Butterfly (Sandesh) 3; Big Bay (Yash Narredu) 4; Wb: Shd, Snk, Lnk. T: 0:57.65. TB: Shazaan Shah. Fav: Social Butterfly.
4. Tricumdas Dwarkadas Trophy (Div I) - 1200M: Skandha (Nazak Chenoy) TS Jodha 1; JUracan (Ajinkya) 2; Jaisalmer (Ramswarup) 3; El Moran (David Allanl) 4; Wb: 1-1/2, 1/2, 2-1/4L. T: 1:09.68. TB: Nazak Chenoy. Fav: Skandha.
5. Gool S Poonawalla Million - 1200M: Nebula (Jaydev Mody) TS Jodha 1; Lady Scarlet (Sandesh) 2; Puccini (Trevor Patel) 3; Rambo (Mustakim Alam) 4; Wb: Lnk, 1, 6-1/4L. T: 1:09.15. TB: Behram Cama. Fav: Starlight Serenade.
6. Ramnivas Ramnarain Ruia Gold Cup - 2000M: Baychimo (Shiven Surendranath) Sandesh 1; Zacharias (G Vivek) 2; Gunsmoke (Yash Narredu) 3; Red Bishop (Trevor Patel) 4. Wb: 2-1/4, 4-1/2, 3/4L. T: 1:59.25. TB: A Jodha. Fav: Baychimo.
7. Villoo C Poonawalla Indian Oaks - 2400M: Fynbos (KN Dhunjibhoy) G Vivek 1; Kings Gambit (Yash Narredu) 2; Dreamer (David Allan) 3; Golden Dancer (Sandesh) 4. Wb: 6-1/4, 2-3/4, 3-1/2L. T: 2:29.34. TB: Pesi Shroff. Fav: Fynbos.
8. Tricumdas Dwarkadas Trophy (Div II) - 1200M: Appalachian (Miss Nazak Chenoy) TS Jodha 1; Gold Bar (Santosh G) 2; Rennaissance (NB Kuldeep) 3; Manwar (S Kamble) 4. Wb: 1/2, 1-1/4L, Lnk. T: 1:11.16. TB: Nazak Chenoy. Fav: Gold Bar.
9. Marchetta Trophy - 1400M: La Dolce Vita (Mrs Bakhtawar Chenoy) A Omkar 1; Algonquin (Sandesh) 2; Ministry Of Time (Trevor Patel) 3; Ashwa Ankara (Nazil) 4. Wb: 2-1/4L, Shd, Lnk. T: 1:23.02. TB: Bezan Chenoy. Fav: Ministry Of Time.

Bengaluru dividends:
I race: Rs 103w; 17, 10, 11p; Fc: Rs 269; Q: Rs 90; Shp: Rs 20; Thp: Rs 34: Tri: Rs 257 & 136; Ex: Rs 5,726 & 17,179.
II race: Rs 25w; 12, 10p; Fc: Rs 48; Q: Rs 29; Shp: Rs 24; Thp: Rs 22; Tri: Rs 47 & 29;
III race: Rs 96w; 20, 16, 10p; Fc: Rs 1,309; Q: Rs 379; Shp: Rs 39; Thp: Rs 47; Tri: Rs 943 & 394; Ex: Rs 5,573 & 3,284.
IV race: Rs 18w; 11, 14, 19p: Fc: Rs 77; Q: Rs 64; Shp: Rs 40; Thp: Rs 44; Tri: Rs 532 & 359; Ex: Rs 873 & 189.
V race: Rs 28w; 12, 10, 18p; Fc: Rs 70; Q: Rs 41; Shp: Rs 33; Thp: Rs 42; Tri: Rs 306 & 92; Ex: Rs 2,869 & 4,918.
VI race: Rs 22w; 11, 12, 10p; Fc: Rs 43; Q: Rs 22; Shp: Rs 31; Thp: Rs 32; Tri: Rs 115 & 73; Ex: Rs 233 & 67.
VII race: Rs 17w; 10, 40, 32p; Fc: Rs 156; Q: Rs 225; Shp: Rs 127; Thp: Rs 41; Tri: Rs 1,060 & 439; Ex: Rs 3,715 & 1,393.
VIII race: Rs 105w; 25, 10, 33p; Fc: Rs 310; Q: Rs 89; Shp: Rs 29; Thp: Rs 68; Tri: Rs 1,409 & 1,449; Ex: Rs 22,904 (c/o).
IX race: Rs 117w; 41, 19, 14p; Fc: Rs 1,296; Q: Rs 1,078; Shp: Rs 50; Thp: Rs 50; Tri: Rs 2,685 & 708; Ex: Rs 43,535..
I jackpot: Rs 7,944 (26) **Runner-up:** Rs 1,806 (49). **II jackpot:** Rs 24,004 (29). **Runner-up:** Rs 623 (479).
I treble: Rs 2,309 (31)
II treble: Rs 520 (100).
III treble: Rs 2,887 (31).

SG Pipers win women's HIL title

RANCHI, PTI

SG Pipers defeated Shrachi Bengal Tigers 3-2 in the shootout after an intense 1-1 stalemate in the regulation time to win the women's Hockey India League 2025-26 title here on Saturday.

Preeti Dubey (53rd) and Lalremsiami (16th) scored for SG Pipers and Shrachi Bengal Tigers respectively in the regulation time.

Captain Navneet Kaur, Juana Castellaro and Lola Riera scored and Bansari Solanki made saves in the shootout to help SG Pipers win the final.

Navneet Kaur

Hockey India League announced prize money of Rs 1.5 crore for SG Pipers, Rs 1 crore for Shrachi Bengal Tigers and Rs 50 kakh for third-place finishers Ranchi Royals.

Shrachi Bengal Tigers' Agustina Gorzelany finished as the top scorer of the tournament and was awarded Rs 5 lakh, while SG Pipers captain Navneet was crowned the 'player of the tournament' and was awarded Rs 20 lakh.

Ranchi Royals were honoured with the Fairplay Award. SG Pipers' Bansari Solanki was named the Best Goalkeeper, while her teammate Sunelita Toppo earned the Upcoming Player of the tournament award, with both players receiving Rs 5 lakh each.

PV Sindhu

Impressive Sindhu bows out in semifinal

KUALA LUMPUR, PTI: Ace Indian shuttler PV Sindhu's impressive run came to an end after a straight-game defeat to China's Wang Zhiyi in the women's singles semi-finals of the season-opening Malaysia Open Super 1000 here on Saturday.

The two-time Olympic medallist could not sustain the pressure against the world No. 2, committing too many unforced errors in a 16-21, 15-21 loss, which brought down curtains on India's campaign in the tournament.

Playing her first tournament after recovering from a foot injury that kept her on the sidelines since October last year, Sindhu also let slip an 11-6 lead in the second game.

'Yet to receive any response from ICC'

DHAKA, PTI: Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam Bulbul on Friday said the board is yet to receive any response from the International Cricket Council (ICC) regarding its concerns over playing at venues in India for the upcoming T20 World Cup, reiterating that the BCB's position remains unchanged.

Bangladesh have expressed reluctance to tour India for the tournament, scheduled to begin on February 7, and have sought to shift their matches to co-host Sri Lanka citing security concerns.

The BCB's apprehensions followed the release of Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman from IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders on the instructions of the BCCI for unspecified reasons, amid reports of attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh.

"We haven't yet received any reply from the ICC. We have sent all the attachments and proofs of our concern," Bulbul told media persons.

CRICKET FIRST ODI

Spotlight remains on Kohli, Rohit

Shreyas set for India return after recovering from injury

VADODARA, PTI

Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma's prime form is expected to drive India's progress in ODIs as the full-strength hosts take on a new-look New Zealand in the first match of the three-match series here on Sunday.

Even as focus remains on the T20 World Cup which is less than a month away, Kohli and Rohit will take centre stage in the three ODIs over the next seven days.

There has been no dearth of game-time for the two superstars who played a couple of matches each in the Vijay Hazare Trophy's league round, piling up big runs to underline that they are not going away anytime soon.

But it remains to be seen how India captain Shubman Gill responds after being axed from the T20 World Cup side, with his form being a concern apart from the injuries that kept him out of the majority of the series against South Africa late last year.

Gill's return, however, is likely to take Yashasvi Jaiswal out of the top order where he scored his maiden ODI ton in the last match against South Africa.

The return of Shreyas Iyer should end a largely unsuccessful run of experiments in the batting order, with the 31-year-old set to claim his No 4 spot back.

KL Rahul's continued role as a lower-order batter and wicketkeeper is set to keep Rishabh Pant out of the XI, with the latter remaining second choice in the 50-overs format.

While Iyer, Pant and Mohammed Siraj were not part of the preparations for the ODI series here in Kotambi until Saturday, Ravindra Jadeja trained at full tilt on Friday, signalling his availability.

All eyes will be on Virat Kohli (left) and Rohit Sharma when India take on New Zealand in the first ODI on Sunday. PTI

India vs New Zealand
HEAD TO HEAD IN ODIS

	Mats	Ind	NZ	Ties/ NR
Overall	120	62	50	1/7
Since 2023	7	7	0	0/0
In India	40	31	8	0/1

Bilateral ODI Series IN INDIA

Year	Result
2023	Ind won 3-0
2017	Ind won 2-1
2016	Ind won 3-2
2010	Ind won 5-0
1999	Ind won 3-2
1995	Ind won 3-2
1988	Ind won 4-0

Record in ODIs since 2025

India		New Zealand
14	Mats	20
11	Won	17
3	Lost	3
78.6%	Win%	85.0%

NOTE: New Zealand are currently on a 9-match winning streak in ODIs.

Compiled by Arun Gopalakrishnan

Jasprit Bumrah and Hardik Pandya are not part of the ODI series to keep them fresh for T20 assignments, leaving the pace-bowling duties to Mohammed Siraj, Arshdeep Singh, Harshit Rana and Prasidh Krishna.

Kuldeep Yadav, Washington Sundar and Jadeja will share the spin-bowling responsibilities in a format where evening dew and the flat nature of wickets across the country ensure that the emphasis shifts to containment rather than aggressive wicket-taking.

It will be the first time that the new Baroda Cricket Association Stadium in Kotambi will host a men's international.

The venue has previously hosted a women's ODI series between India and the West Indies. For New Zealand, their loss

LIVE 1:30 PM, STAR SPORTS NETWORK, JIOHOTSTAR

to India in last year's Champions Trophy final carries little significance, as this series presents an ideal opportunity to test new and second-line players.

Whether they have their preferred players available or not, the Black Caps will stick to the team mantra which worked wonders in their last visit to India in 2024-25 when they hammered India 3-0 in the Test series.

During that tour, several Kiwi players spoke about wanting to "fire the first shot" against India and the team mantra on this trip is "you are where your feet are", something that is meant to keep the players' minds on the task and not on the challenges around them, given New Zealand are without several of their frontline players and facing India in their backyard.

Mitchell Santner is missing the ODIs due to a groin injury and Tom Latham is back home for the birth of his first child.

Former captain Kane Williamson is in South Africa, fulfilling his T20 commitments in the SA20.

Rachin Ravindra and fast bowler Jacob Duffy have been rested, while Matt Henry, returning from calf tear, is focused on returning in the T20I series keeping the World Cup in mind. Michael Bracewell will lead the side in Santner's absence, who will return for the T20Is, while attention will also be on how the lanky all-rounder Kyle Jamieson and the 23-year-old leg-spinner Adithya Ashok perform.

Jayden Lennox has been brought into the Kiwis' side as a like-for-like replacement for Santner.

Even as they have plenty of new and inexperienced faces in the squad, New Zealand still have a formidable batting strength which includes Devon Conway, Daryl Mitchell, Henry Nicholls, Will Young and even Glenn Phillips.

Teams (from): India: Shubman Gill (c), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, KL Rahul (wk), Rishabh Pant (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Arshdeep Singh, Prasidh Krishna, Mohammed Siraj, Harshit Rana.
New Zealand: Michael Bracewell (c), Devon Conway (wk), Mitchell Hay (wk), Nick Kelly, Henry Nicholls, Will Young, Josh Clarkson, Zak Foulkes, Daryl Mitchell, Glenn Phillips, Adithya Ashok, Kristian Clarke, Kyle Jamieson, Jayden Lennox, Michael Rae.

Gill calls T20 World Cup snub a 'destiny'

VADODARA, PTI: Left out of the T20 World Cup squad, India's ODI and Test captain Shubman Gill on Saturday said he respects the selectors' decision and remains focused on giving his best whenever the opportunity arises.

The 26-year-old was not considered for next month's T20 World Cup despite leading India in the longer formats. He has played 36 T20Is for India, scoring 869 runs at an average of 28.03 with a strike rate of 138.59.

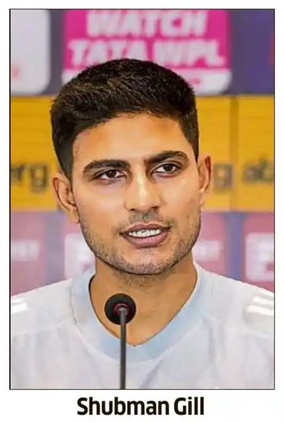
"I am where I have to be and whatever is written in my destiny no one can take that from me," Gill told reporters ahead of the first ODI against New Zealand here on Sunday.

"A player always believes he will try his best for the country and the selectors have taken their decision. I always try to be in the moment and it makes the life simpler."

India will play three ODIs followed by three T20Is ahead of the T20 World Cup, which starts on February 7.

"The last time we played ODIs against New Zealand, I made my debut and I always cherish that," he said.

"I don't think any format is easy, if you look at it, the Indian team hasn't won an ODI World Cup since 2011. It's easy to say but no format is easy and it requires a lot of effort and determination."



Shubman Gill

Solid Giants edge Warriorz

NAVI MUMBAI, PTI

Australian batter Phoebe Litchfield's commanding knock of 78 off just 40 balls went in vain as Gujarat Giants beat UP Warriorz by 10 runs in a high-scoring Women's Premier League match here on Saturday.

Sent in to bat, captain Ashleigh Gardner struck a scintillating 65 before Georgia Wareham played a late cameo of 27 not out off just 10 balls as Gujarat Giants posted an impressive 207 for 4.

That total proved to be enough despite a stunning counter-attacking innings from Litchfield who kept the Warriorz in the hunt. But her departure in the 16th over virtually ended Warriorz's valiant resistance. She hit eight fours and five sixes during her knock.

At the end, Warriorz ended at 197 for 8, falling short by 10 runs.

Asha Sobhana made a late charge with an unbeaten 27 off just 10 balls with the help of three fours and two sixes, but that turned out to be too late in the day.

For Gujarat Giants, Australian Georgia Wareham grabbed two wickets for 30 runs with her leg-spin, to add to her stunning cameo with the bat earlier in the day.

Renuka Singh and Sophie Devine also got two wickets each while Gardner and Rajeshwari Gayakwad took one apiece.

Gujarat Giants' Ashleigh Gardner en route her fluent 65 against UP Warriorz during their WPL match at the DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai on Saturday. PTI

Warriorz began their chase of 208 on a shaky note with opener Kiran Navgire getting out in the fifth ball from Renuka.

But captain and the other opener Meg Lanning (30 off 27 balls) and one-down Phoebe Litchfield steadied the innings with a 70-run stand for the second wicket.

MI beat DC

Mumbai Indians' Nat Sciver-Brunt and Harmanpreet Kaur smashed unbeaten half-centuries, while pacer Nicola Carey ran through the middle order as the defending champions returned to winning ways, defeating Delhi Capitals by 50 runs in the second Women's Premier League game on Saturday.

Sciver-Brunt hammered a 46-ball 70, while Harmanpreet -- smarting from a last-ball defeat to Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Friday -- slammed an unbeaten 74 off 42 balls as Mumbai Indians posted a fighting 195 for 4 on the back of fine form from the two stalwarts.

Brief scores: Gujarat Giants: 207/4 in 20 overs (Sophie Devine 38, Anushka Sharma 44, Ashleigh Gardner 65, Georgia Wareham 27 n.o.; Sophie Ecclestone 2-32) bt UP Warriorz: 197/8 in 20 overs (Meg Lanning 30, Phoebe Litchfield 78, Shweta Sehrawat 25, Asha Sobhana 27 n.o.; Renuka Singh 2-25, Sophie Devine 2-55, Georgia Wareham 2-30) by 10 runs.
Mumbai Indians: 195/4 in 20 overs (Nat Sciver-Brunt 70, Harmanpreet Kaur 74 n.o.; Nandani Sharma 3-26) bt Delhi Capitals: 145 all out in 19 overs (Chinelle Henry 56; Nat Sciver-Brunt 2-29, Nicola Carey 3-37, Amelia Kerr 3-24) by 50 runs.

Vastrakar out for two weeks with hamstring injury

NAVI MUMBAI, PTI: India and Royal Challengers Bengaluru pace-bowling all-rounder Pooja Vastrakar has been ruled out for at least two weeks of the ongoing Women's Premier League due to a hamstring injury.

The 26-year-old, who last played a competitive game in the T20 World Cup in October 2024, was brought for Rs 85 lakh during the Women's Premier League auction in November last year and the WPL was supposed to be her comeback.

"Pooja Vastrakar was not available for selection (against Mumbai Indians)," , the franchise's head coach Malolan Rangarajan said after the team's opening match here on Friday.

"Two weeks prior to her release from the CoE (Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru), she unfortunately tweaked her hamstring. The information that we have is that she will be there for two weeks more.

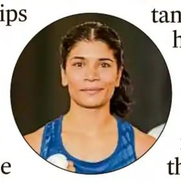
"Earlier, she was there (at the CoE) for her shoulder, now she has a hamstring issue. It's a week by week process. So let's see where she is at."

RCB, riding on an all-round display by Nadine de Klerk, beat defending champions Mumbai Indians.

Nikhat, Lovlina punch titles

GREATER NOIDA, PTI

World Championships bronze medallist Mohammed Hussamuddin marked an emphatic return from a prolonged injury layoff with a gold medal in the 60kg category, while established stars Nikhat Zareen **(in pic)** and Lovlina Borgohain also claimed titles at the National Boxing Championships here on Saturday.



The Services Sports Control Board (SSCB) underlined its dominance by finishing atop the medals table with a staggering 12 gold, including nine in the men's section, reaffirming its depth and strength across weight categories.

Hussamuddin, who had been sidelined for several months following injury setbacks, produced a gritty performance to edge out fellow Services boxer and defending 60kg champion Sachin Siwach in a closely-fought final.

The bout ended in a narrow 3-2 split verdict after Hussamuddin overturned an early deficit with superior shot selection and ring control.

The 31-year-old started cautiously, allowing the younger Sachin to dictate terms in the opening round, but gradually asserted himself by landing cleaner combinations and counter-punches.

Confusion briefly followed at the end of the bout when the result was initially announced in Sachin's favour before being corrected moments later.

"This title was very important for me as this year has a lot of tournaments coming up. After the injury, I needed to prove to myself and to others that I can still do it," an emotional Hussamuddin said after the win.

One of the standout performers of the championships was World Cup medallist Jadumani Singh, who capped a dream run by clinching gold in the 55kg category and was later named the best male boxer of the tournament.

The 21-year-old Manipuri, who had earlier out-punched two-time Olympian and 2019 world championships silver medallist Amit Panghal in the semifinals, displayed remarkable composure and stamina to win a physically demanding final against fellow Services boxer Pawan Bartwal.

High-flying Keerthana storms into semis

BENGALURU, DHNS: Karnataka's Keerthana Pandian powered into the semifinals with a lopsided victory over state-mate R Umadevi in the women's National Snooker Championship in Bahadurgarh, Haryana on Saturday.

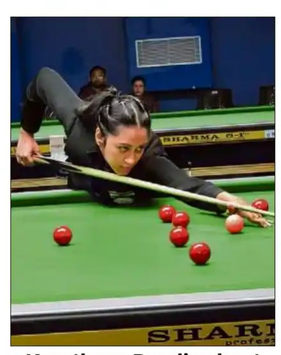
The 23-year-old, a two-time National 6-red snooker champion, outclassed her rival 3-0 in the best-of-five frame final to set up a semifinal meeting with the formidable Amee Kamani.

Keerthana was dominant from the get-go, hardly giving Umadevi a look-in. Although the Kolar cueist didn't come up with the big breaks, she made capital of the chances she got. The youngster let her opponent win a mere 27 points in the entire match.

At the adjacent table, Madhya Pradesh's Amee was even more authoritative in her 3-0 demolition of Snenthra Babu. The former champion came up with a break of 47 in the final frame.

Defending champion Anupama Ramachandran outclassed fellow Tamil Nadu cueist L Shruthi 3-0. In the last-four stage, Anupama takes on Ishika Shah, who overcame Aanya Patel 3-1.

Results (Quarterfinals): Keerthana Pandian (Kar) bt R Umadevi (Kar) 3-0 (63-8, 74-16, 67-3); Amee Kamani (MP) bt Snenthra Babu (TN) 3-0 (65-2, 70-5, 84 (47) -15); Anupama Ramachandran (TN) bt L Shruthi (TN) 3-0 (74 (47) -37, 65-30, 71-7); Ishika Shah (MP) bt Aanya Patel (Guj) 3-1 (32-42, 63-37, 81-60).



Keerthana Pandian beat State-mate R Umadevi to progress to the semifinals of the Women's National Snooker Championship.

IN BRIEF

Karnataka win 11 medals

▸ Karnataka clinched three gold medals, seven silver and one bronze at the 14th National Dragon Boat Championship for Senior Men and Women, Junior Boys and Girls, hosted from January 6 to 9 in Bhopal, reports DHNS.

The State clinched gold medals in D10 mixed (500m), D10 men (500m) and D10 men (200m) competititons.

◆ ON TV ◆

CRICKET

Women's Premier League: Gujarat Giants vs Delhi Capitals **(7:30 pm)**. **LIVE** on **Star Sports** Network, JioHotstar.

3rd T20I: Sri Lanka vs Pakistan **(7:00 pm)**. **LIVE** on **Sony Sports Network**

FOOTBALL

FA Cup: Derby County vs Leeds United **(5:30 pm)**, Portsmouth vs Arsenal **(7:30 pm)**, Manchester United vs Brighton **(10:00 pm)**. Live on **Star Sports Network.**

HOCKEY

HIL: HIL GC vs Vedanta Kalinga Lancers **(5:00 pm)**, Ranchi vs. Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers **(7:30 pm)**. **LIVE** on **Sony Sports Network.**

TENNIS

United Cup: Final **(12:00 pm)**. **LIVE** on **Sony Sports Network.**

BADMINTON

Malaysia Open: Final **(9:30 am)**. **LIVE** on **Star Sports Network, JioHotstar.**

Alcaraz sinks Sinner in sold-out exhibition match

INCHEON, AFP: Carlos Alcaraz **(in pic)** beat great rival Jannik Sinner in a light-hearted sell-out exhibition match in South Korea on Saturday ahead of the Australian Open.

Taking place eight days before the Melbourne Grand Slam and in their first appearances this year, the Spanish world No. 1 won 7-5, 7-6 (8/6) in front of an enthusiastic 12,000 crowd in Incheon.

Neither will play competitively until the Australian Open, where Italy's world No. 2 Sinner is the defending two-time champion. South Korean organisers have not said how much the two players earned from the match but reports in Italy suggest each could pocket more than $2 million for the match that lasted one hour and 47 minutes.

Alcaraz and Sinner have taken a stranglehold on men's tennis over the past two years, splitting all four Grand Slam titles between them in 2024 and 2025.

Arch competitors on the court but good friends off it, Alcaraz has the upper hand in their rivalry came into the exhibition boasting a 10-6 record.

Sabalenka into third straight final

BRISBANE, AGENCIES

Aryna Sabalenka beat Karolina Muchova in straight sets to reach her third Brisbane International final in a row on Saturday, a week ahead of the Australian Open.

Sabalenka looked in great touch against the tricky Czech, who had won their last three meetings and went into the match as one of the few players with a winning record over the world No. 1.

Aryna Sabalenka defeated Karolina Muchova in straight sets to make the Brisbane International final.

But Sabalenka showed her class and power as she broke Muchova once in each set to take the semifinal 6-3, 6-4 in 89 minutes and will face Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk in the final.

"I struggled against her a couple of times (in the past)," Sabalenka, the defending champion, said of Muchova.

"I'm happy that today I was focused from the beginning and I was able to show such great tennis and put her under so much pressure and get the win in straight sets.

"That's just super great."

The 27-year-old Belarusian said she could feel her level getting better with every match in Brisbane, where she is yet to drop a set.

Poland, Swiss in final

Poland took revenge on holders the USA to set up a United Cup final against Switzerland in Sydney despite Iga Swiatek suffering defeat to Coco Gauff on Saturday, reports AFP.

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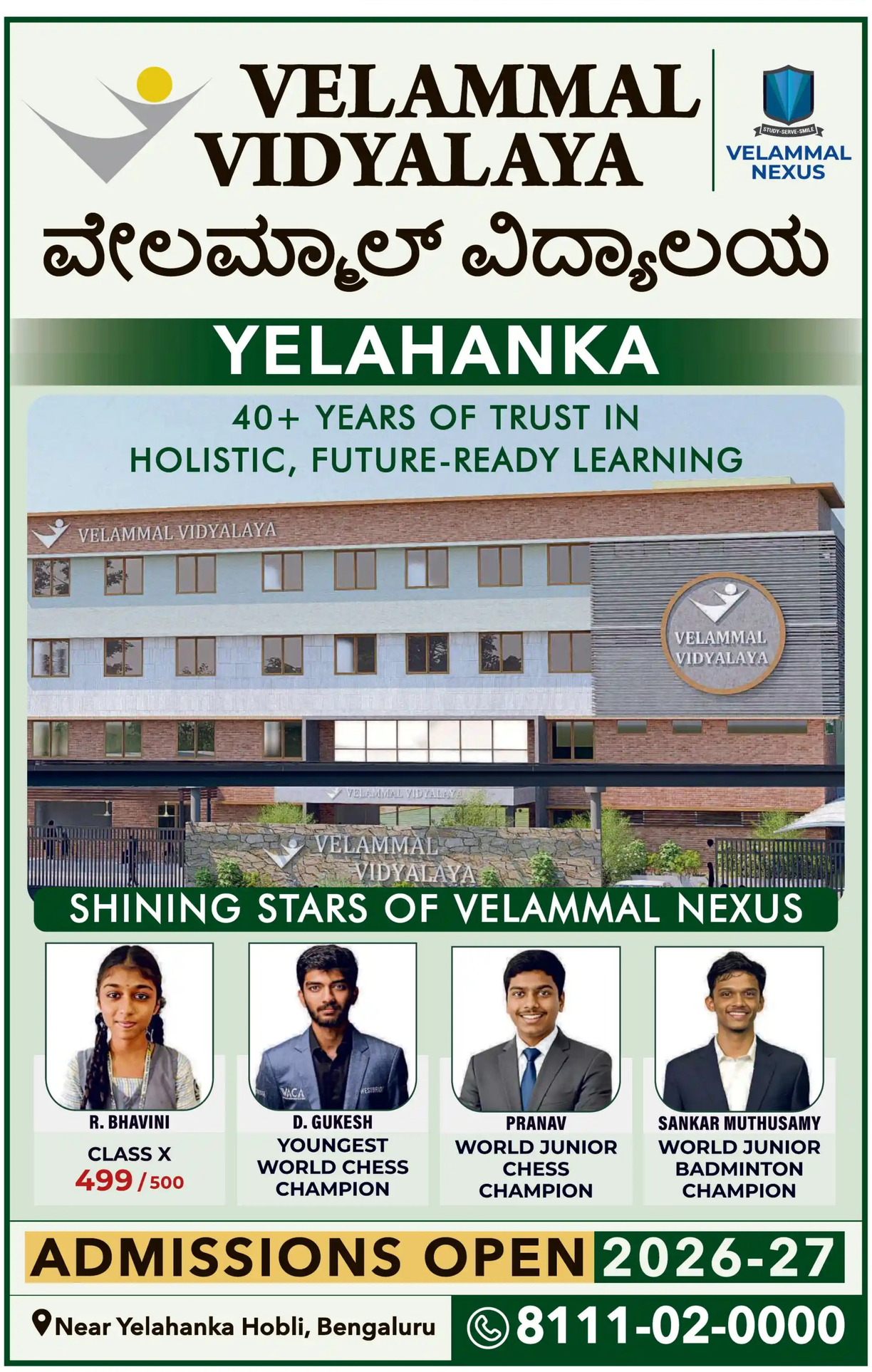


TENNIS BENGALURU OPEN

Pedro wears the crown

Top-seeded Spaniard defeats Kazakh's Skatov in straight sets

ADITYA K HALDER
BENGALURU, DHNS

Top-seeded Spaniard Pedro Martinez dominated the court to lift the Bengaluru Open title as the world No. 96 defeated the sixth seed Kazakh Timofey Skatov in straight sets 7-6 (5), 6-3 at the SM Krishna Tennis Stadium here on Saturday.

Meanwhile in the doubles final, Colombian-American pair Nicolas Barrientos and Benjamin Kittay defeated French duo Luca Sanchez and Arthur Reymond in an intense final 7-6 (11), 7-5.

The crowd, however, was kept on the edge of their seats in the singles final in what turned out to be an enthralling battle in the first set.

The 28-year-old Martinez, who showed a familiar pattern of understanding his opponent in the first set before going for the jugular in the second, had to work hard for his eighth ATP Challenger title against the 24-year-old Kazakh rival who came into final dropping no sets in the season opener so far.

The first set lived upto its billing as both rivals held on to their serves by bringing their own set of qualities to the match.

While Skatov used an array of his serves, including top spin and slice services, to test his rival's retrieving abilities, Martinez's serves showed an increase in tempo as it only got faster with every game.

Spain's Pedro Martinez (right) won the singles title after defeating Kazakhstan's Timofey Skatov in the Bengaluru Open final at the SM Krishna Tennis Stadium in Bengaluru on Saturday. KSLTA MEDIA

The duo held on to their serves with comfort until the eighth game when the Spanish man got a clear idea of his 5'11" Kazakh rival's retrieval abilities with some youthful court coverage followed by a cross-court forehand winner.

Skatov went on to earn himself a break point opportunity with his never-say-die attitude around the court but his opponent had the experience on his side to hold the serve.

The 6'1" Martinez was then smart enough to attack a now-tired looking Kazakh after all those running and made him toy hard to save three set points while struggling to find accuracy with his serves.

The Kazakh, however, showed he just lost a bit of momentum and soon regained it to take the match into tie breaker.

The tie breaker turned into another see-saw battle with both taking points off their serves before a rain interruption came at 3-3.

The match resumed following a 20 minute break and took a bit of rhythm away from the match as the Kazakh returned to the court with an unforced error, allowing Martinez just the opening he needed to take the set.

The Spanish carried the momentum straight into the second set as he broke the Kazakh off the first game to gain an upper hand. Skatov did himself no favour either with unforced errors.

It was only Martinez's game to lose from this point and the Spanish only turned bullish on his service game allowing next to no opportunity to Skatov, who dropped his serve again after handing three break points to his higher-ranked opponent to complete the formalities.

Results: Final: Singles: 1-Pedro Martinez (ESP) bt 6-Timofey Skatov (Kaz) 7-6 (5), 6-3.
Doubles: 4-Nicolas Barrientos (Col)/Benjamin Kittay (USA) bt 3-Luca Sanchez/Arthur Reymond (Fra) 7-6 (11), 7-5.

Kashvi Kandikuppa

Kashvi fireworks seal Karnataka's spot in quarters

BENGALURU, DHNS: Kashvi Kandikuppa cracked a blistering hundred while team-mate Nynishya Reddy Patil picked up an economical five-for as Karnataka registered a mammoth 275-run victory over listless Manipur to seal their place in the quarterfinals as the group toppers in the BCCI Women's U-15 One-day trophy at the Aditya Academy Ground in Kolkata on Saturday.

After winning the toss and opting to bat, Kashvi struck a 66-ball 158 not out, lacing it with 23 fours and seven sixes to help Karnataka post 321 for five in 35 overs.

Kashvi also leads the run-scoring charts in the competition with 506 runs at an average of 235 with three hundreds and one fifty.

Chasing a massive 322 for victory, Manipur failed to even reach the 50-run mark, as they were shot out for a mere 46 all out in 23.3 overs, with Nynishya (5/11) acting as the wrecker-in-chief.

Brief scores: Karnataka: 321/5 in 35 overs (Sheetal Santhosh 52, Kashvi S Shekar 31, Kashvi Kandikuppa 158 n.o.; Farjiya 2-38) bt Manipur: 46 all out in 23.3 overs (Patil Nynishya Reddy 5-11, Sreeka Chatura 2-8, Harshitha K 2-1).

Divyanshi, Anusha progess

VADODARA, PTI: Youngster Divyanshi Bhowmick and the experienced Anusha Kutumbale recorded stunning wins to reach the women's singles quarterfinals of the WTT Feeder Series here on Saturday.

In the women's singles pre-quarterfinals, Divyanshi beat second seed Park Gahyeon of Korea Republic 8-11, 11-9, 11-9, 13-11, while Anusha defeated Lee Zion 11-6, 11-6, 11-9.

Bhandage, Rahul power Mathikere CC home

BENGALURU, DHNS

State player Manoj Bhandage smashed a sizzling century to power Mathikere Cricket Club to a resounding 251-run win over BMS Engineering College in the KSCA Group I - V Division league-cum-knockout tournament for the JB Mallaradhya Shield here.

LOCAL CRICKET

Bhandage slammed a 116-ball 173 as Mathikere posted a commanding 379/9 in 50 overs. Rahul Shetty then ensured BMS were never in the chase as his 5/25 saw them being bowled out for 128 in 39.5 overs.

Brief scores: Mathikere Cricket Club: 379/9 in 50 overs (Adithya Krishnan 46, Manoj Bhandage 173, Rahul Menon 41, Chandru Palandira Aiyanna 26 n.o.; Manish N 2-52, Sunand Sriram 2-94, Dhanush Pai 2-26) bt BMS Engineering College: 128 all out in 39.5 overs (Bhuvan BR 25; Chandru Palandira Aiyanna 2-34, Rahul Shetty 5-24, Rahul Menon 3-30).
Bowlers Cricket Club: 137 all out in 40.2 overs (Abinith Gowli 41, Ayush K Y 33; Chukka Naga Santhosh Pavan 2-39, Deepak NJ 2-17, Nirush S 2-11, Ram Patil 2-21) lt to YMCA Cricket Club (3): 141/2 in 24.1 overs (Vivek NP 60 n.o., Shivaraj R 60 n.o.).
Friends Cricket Club: 118 all out in 35.5 overs (Karthik V Gowda 2-30, Venkatachalapathi R 4-30, Sri Thilak N Kolar P 2-17, Manoj Kumar R 2-10) lt to Young Boys Cricket Club, Kolar: 122/3 in 24.2 overs (AM Srihari 78 n.o.; Hemanth Kumar 2-43).
Star Cricketers XI: 231/8 in 45 overs (Akhilesh S Shetty 33, Sandeep Ganganna 48, Srivatsa Ranganath 28, Anil K Vishwanath 44 n.o.; Dhruvinraj Shetty 3-42, Vignesh Nag A 3-39) bt Palace Orchard Cricket Club: 202 all out in 42.1 overs (Vrijesh NG 94, Vinod C 31; Ganesh Vinod Naik 3-25, Jay Rajesh Jain 3-34).

Ashmita, Dhrupad help Karnataka top medals tally

DIU, PTI: Swimming powerhouse Karnataka ended on top of the medal standings at the Khelo India Beach Games as Ashmita Chandra and Dhrupad Ramakrishna clinched the women's and men's 5km Open Water event gold medals respectively at Ghoghla Beach here on Saturday.

Karnataka topped the standings with three gold, all from Open Water swimming, two silver and six bronze to win the overall crown in the second edition of the event.

Tamil Nadu finished second with three gold, two silver and three bronze while last edition's winners Manipur finished third with three gold, two silver and two bronze.

Madhya Pradesh finished fourth with a tally of three gold, one silver and one bronze, thanks to their exploits in pencak silat.

With two gold, two silver and four bronze, hosts Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman; Diu finished sixth behind Haryana, who ended the Games with a tally of two gold, four silver and two bronze medals.

Jammu and Kashmir, Odisha, Nagaland and Rajasthan also finished with two gold medals each to complete the top-10 positions in the medals tally.

History for K'taka

The Karnataka beach soccer team secured its first-ever national medal at the Khelo India Beach Games, finishing the competition in joint third-place with Maharashtra.

In the semifinals, Karnataka were handed a 6-3 defeat by Goa.

Saatwik, Idika swim to gold

BENGALURU, DHNS: Swimmers Saatwik Nayak Sujir and Idika Bhat stole the spotlight by adding gold to Karnataka's tally on the second day of the SFI Open Water National Championship at Thanirbhavi Beach in Mangaluru on Friday.

Saatwik topped the podium in the Group 2 boys' 7.5 km by finishing the race in 1:51:06 ahead of his state-mate Kishan SV, who timed 1:51:14 to grab a silver.

Results: Boys: Group 2: 7.5 km: Saatwik Nayak Sujir (Kar) 1:51:06, 1; Kishan SV (Kar) 1:51:14, 2; C Sharan (TN) 1:56:43, 3.
Group 4: 3 km: Monish Naidu P (TN) 27:36.0, 1; Ronith Arun Kumar (Kar) 27:47.0, 2; K Aadhil (Kar) 27:48.0, 3.
Men: Open 5 km: Pavan Dhananjaya 1:03:22, 1; Renukacharya Hodmani 1:05:27, 2; Dhyan Balakrishna & Surya JT 1:05:32, 3. Girls: Group 2: 7.5 km: Enika Agrawal (Raj) 1:56:43, 1.
Group 4: 3 km: Idika Bhat (Kar) 32:31.0, 1; Devika M (Kar) 33:53.0, 2; Reva Nikhil Parab (TN) 34:43.0, 3.
Women: Open 5 km: Astha Choudhury (Asm) 1:13:46, 1; Jahnabhi Kashyap (Asm) 1:13:51, 2; Janya BS (Kar) 1:18:24, 3.

Neeraj splits with Czech coach Zelezny

NEW DELHI, PTI

Two-time Olympic medal-winning javelin throw star Neeraj Chopra on Saturday announced an end to his partnership with Czech coach Jan Zelezny after just one season, which the Indian said was marked by "progress, respect and a shared love for the sport."

Chopra did not specify the reason for ending the stint with Zelezny, a bonafide legend of the sport who holds the world record and under whose tutelage the Haryana-lad breached the 90m mark last year.

Reflecting on their work, Chopra said to learn directly from an athlete he had admired since childhood was a dream come true and gave him a completely new "toolbox of exercises, technical ideas, and fresh perspectives".

"Working with Jan opened my eyes to so many new ideas. The way he thinks about technique, rhythm, and movement is incredible, and I learned a lot from every single session we had together," Chopra said.

ILLUSIONS AND DELUSIONS

In a shifting world, India needs a Budget for balance

TCA Ranganathan
The former chairman of the Export Import Bank of India is a banker with a theory of everything
@tcartca

Given the international pyrotechnics and as we are in our budget season, it may be a fitting occasion to take stock of our economic position. Complex systems, such as national economies, are best understood through the familiar glass-half-full or glass-half-empty lens. Seen this way, India's half-full picture is impressive: we remain among the fastest-growing economies despite tariff tantrums in our largest export market; our stock and IPO markets are vibrant, ranking next only to the New York Stock Exchange in returns; and we have a large, ever-expanding consumer society. Demand for air travel, SUVs, luxury housing, and other high-end goods continues to rise, reflecting growing confidence and aspiration.

Yet the half-empty view is stark. We remain heavily dependent on imported goods and technologies, a vulnerability with serious national security implications in a fractured world. Our metropolises – already overcrowded and polluted – are struggling to cope with migration and unchecked growth. Thirty-nine Indian cities rank among the world's 50 most polluted. Delhi, Bengaluru, and Mumbai are choking under traffic congestion and toxic air, threatening the future trajectory of our services exports, our primary growth engine, anchored in these very metros.

An imbalance in our growth model is being signalled by our capital markets. In the Nifty 500 today, banks and financial services account for roughly one-third of market capitalisation; IT services add 9%, while industrials languish at barely 6%. Two decades ago, energy and industrials together dominated the market, accounting for nearly half of it. The shift is striking: investors have favoured services, where scalability is easier and regulatory risks are fewer, while shying away from manufacturing and industrials. By contrast, the US equity market, although dominated by technology at nearly 30%, retains about 10% in industrials, while Europe maintains a more balanced mix across industrials, finance, healthcare, and technology. India's 6% industrial share is dangerously low, reflecting not just investor preference but the mis-signals in our policies.

This weakness is troubling because manufacturing growth has not taken off, despite the government's serious intent and initiatives, such as PLI, Make in India, and sectoral packages for electronics, defence, and renewables. R&D schemes, innovation hubs, and infrastructure investments have helped only partially – Apple's limited shift being a rare success. Manufacturing's GDP share is stuck at 15-16%, far below the 25% target, with exports, jobs, and capital inflows dominated by services.

The core issue is a skewed risk-reward balance: manufacturing faces long gestation, regulatory uncertainty, and weak exit options, while services offer faster, smoother returns. Policy signals have been channelling entrepreneurial energy towards services, finance, real estate, and consumer markets – domains where risks are lower, and rewards are faster, leaving manufacturing, especially tech manufacturing, undersupported. Another structural gap lies in our insolvency law. India's IBC lacks US-style Chapter 11 protections that allowed distressed firms (such as GM) to reorganise and preserve value. Without such safeguards, capital-intensive industries carry higher risk premiums, discouraging investment.

The forthcoming Union Budget presents a timely opportunity to address the current imbalance and strengthen the role of manufacturing in India's growth model. A key proposal meriting consideration is the acceleration of the 12 new 'industrial cities' announced some time ago under the National Industrial Corridor Development Programme, along with the eight that were then declared to be already underway. Designed to specialise in distinct sectors, these hubs can enable manufacturing at scale and help rebalance the economy away from its service-heavy tilt.

Alongside, measures that directly reduce entrepreneurial risk can be examined. Co-locating technology institutes within industrial corridors and encouraging third-party provision of labour housing or skilling centres aligned with the hubs' focus would lower project costs and create a stronger ecosystem for new entrepreneurs.

Urban pollution is also signalling design errors. India has over 4,000 statutory towns, 400 cities with populations exceeding 100,000, and 40 cities with populations above 1 million. In most countries, such cities are the bedrock of growth. Yet, in India, fiscal and managerial strength remains concentrated and thus a range of public goods remains scarce outside a privileged circle of capital cities. A more equitable redistribution of human resources across non-metros and a reprogrammed signalling mechanism – eliminating outdated subsidies for metro living, imposing graded vehicle taxes, and congestion levies on firms – could create voluntary decongestion.

The Union Budget is more than an accounting exercise; it is a statement of intent. This year, we could use it to signal confidence in our own capabilities. The world has changed, but India's greatest threats remain internal: polluted cities, congested metros, skewed capital markets, and policy signals that deter entrepreneurs from tech manufacturing. This budget season, let us resist obsessing over Washington or Beijing. Instead, let us confront our own mis-signalling. By broadening our growth base and strengthening resilience, India can chart a confident path forward in a turbulent world.

THIS AND THAT

The stylish audacity of Ilaiyaraaja

As I wrap up my column this Saturday, I am off to the Bengaluru International Exhibition Centre on Tumkur Road to catch a live show to mark a milestone — 50 years of Ilaiyaraaja's music. Many in my circle are huge fans of the film music composer; they even travel across cities to catch his concerts. I count myself as one of his most ardent fans, and I once drove from Bengaluru to Chennai to catch a show. The frenzy was such that it took two hours to reach the venue from the hotel, just 2 km away. Ilaiyaraaja's fans are spread across the world, and the South Indian diaspora turns up in huge numbers whenever he performs abroad.

Yet, I sometimes wonder if the larger world has fully comprehended the extent of his genius. He has never been nominated for a Grammy, and Hollywood hasn't embraced him either. Not that it matters to him, but it rankles his admirers.

Film music is group effort, and multiple authorship defines the film song. The intros and interludes are often composed by musicians other than the composer of the tune. Conventionally, composers in Indian cinema have excelled at making Indian-style melodies, getting their orchestras arranged by those familiar with Western music theory.

This collaboration between Indian and Western musicality has produced some of the most original-sounding music in the world. Before the word 'fusion' even came into vogue, Indian film music was fusing genres from across the world without inhibition. Ilaiyaraaja casually produces what it takes a group of musicians with specialised skills to produce. He makes the tunes and also writes the score for his full orchestra, with separate parts for each instrument. I don't know who else can do that, and at his pace.

But that is not his primary claim to genius. It is difficult to describe the thrill that his initial scores generated among music lovers. The galaxy of composers active when he debuted had individual styles and comparable orchestral arrangements. He arrived with a sensational new approach to phrasing, harmony, and orchestral arrangement. He produced the most audaciously stylish splash of sound we had heard in Indian films. And it drew from a profusion of styles, Indian and Western.

S R Ramakrishna
often sees high art in kitsch and vice versa

Ilaiyaraaja has often spoken about how, with rudimentary knowledge and a phenomenal memory for tunes, he landed the job of assistant to Kannada film music composer G K Venkatesh. He eventually debuted as an independent composer with the 1976 Tamil film *Annakkili*. In fact, YouTube is replete with Ilaiyaraaja lore, with videos chronicling how some of his most iconic songs were made. In recent years, he has taken his listeners through the making of his scores, explaining in detail how the various sections of his orchestra come together.

The 1990s brought a challenger: A R Rahman. With *Roja* (1992), Rahman began exploring the new possibilities of electronic music, synthesisers, and advanced programming. It looked like Ilaiyaraaja's analog-era flamboyance was being overtaken, but his music has stood the test of time, and he is actively composing even at 82. When interviewers ask him about technology overtaking music, he is categorical: "Without performance, there is no music."

At his peak, Ilaiyaraaja's popularity eclipsed the stars; films succeeded on the strength of his music alone. For those upset that he has not got his due, it is a matter of consolation that, in 2025, Ilaiyaraaja recorded and performed his Symphony No. 1, Valiant, with the London Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's 77-piece ensemble.

The Modi dispensation made him a Rajya Sabha member in 2022, as part of the BJP's push for a Tamil Nadu presence. Ilaiyaraaja has been relatively silent in the Upper House. Attendance is sporadic, and he has made no memorable speeches. All of which again underlines how he is a musician first and foremost, and his interest in politics will remain a matter of little consequence.

In his conversations, he can be cutting, but he never holds back when it comes to sharing his insights. At a workshop he conducted in Goa, he gave a live demonstration of his composing philosophy – a film score shouldn't merely represent what is appearing on screen, it should add subtext. He showed what he would do to score for a scene in which a man in murderous rage is out to kill his father. He came up with a gentle lullaby, telling the audience that he is reminding the protagonist about the tender moments he has shared with his father.

The peaks Ilaiyaraaja scaled will remain hard to reach. In an era of AI algorithms and auto-tune, his organic genius reminds us why music must remain human. In him, the most distant streams of music merge to create aural magic.

SANS THE SACRED

The penance for our times

I was recently thinking back to the most annoying parts of my early schooling and recalling the numerous essays in multiple languages we were required to write on the population explosion in India. I bet those who designed that curriculum are feeling pretty silly given that the total fertility rate in India has fallen to 1.9, below the replacement level of 2.1. Perhaps those essays all paid off, but now we must worry about an ageing population and the problems that come with it.

This got me thinking about the various attitudes we see in Sanskrit literature towards having children – the conventional, the bizarre, and the totally unhinged. For one, I remember being taken aback at reading a part of the famous prose text, Bana's *Kadambari*, where the queen Vilasavati is inconsolable after hearing a religious sermon which declares that a son (*putra* in Sanskrit) is so called because, by being born, he saves his parents from hell, and that those who are childless (or maybe sonless?) are doomed to hell. Grief over not having children is one thing, but imagine having to fear eternal or extended damnation!

Then we have Bhishma in the *Mahabharata* – the revered grandfather figure of the Pandava princes. He was the son of the goddess Ganga and the king Shantanu. In another tale, Ganga abandons Shantanu for questioning her judgment in drowning all their previous sons, leaving him with only one – Bhishma. Shantanu must have understandably been lonely, and he falls in love with Satyavati, the daughter of a fisherman chieftain. The chieftain tells the king that he would only permit him to marry Satyavati if Shantanu would agree that Satyavati's son would inherit the kingdom. When Bhishma hears of this, he takes up a vow to remain celibate and so, to never have children. This supposedly terrifying vow earns him the name 'terrifying' (Bhishma means terrifying in Sanskrit). This all leaves one wondering exactly what was terrifying about the vow. Perhaps it was because he was a royal prince, and all royal princes were terrified of their lineages dying out?

Anusha S Rao
is the author of *How to Love in Sanskrit* and likes writing new things about very old things
@AnushaSRao2

The final story for today is one about the sage Saubhari. It is said that he was minding his own business, meditating on the banks of a river, when his eyes fell on a couple of fish who were engaging in rather public displays of affection, and he decided he wanted those pleasures too. So he went straight to the king Mandhata, and asked him to marry off one of his daughters to Saubhari. The king was probably taken aback, but he could not afford to offend the sage, so he suggested that any of the princesses who wished to marry him would be given to him in marriage.

The sage gleaned the cause of the king's reluctance and decided to put his powers obtained through all that difficult penance to good use. He transformed himself into a handsome young man and walked into the inner apartments; all the princesses began to fight amongst themselves to be married to him. This way, he married all fifty princesses! If you thought that was a bit much, he created elaborate palaces, opulences, and pleasures for them, and had a hundred children with each of them. One day, when he got a rare quiet moment – rare because he had five thousand children and fifty wives – he thought about how he had ruined his life, all because of looking at a couple of fish. And so, he gave it all up again and retired to the forest for more penance, this time permanently. Unsurprisingly, his wives also followed him (imagine birthing a hundred children!), and all of them attained liberation.

For our times, though, the solution to declining birth rates is simple. Just find a way to share the women's load in birthing and raising children while running the household; stop careers from punishing women for taking time off for family; and give fathers more parental leave so they can do their share. But perhaps this is even tougher to attain than the miraculous powers of Saubhari's penance.

ROVING REFLECTIONS

A tale of two High Commands

Renowned journalist Rajdeep Sardesai, in his recent video blog, referred to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah as '*jodi* number one'. Together, they function as the BJP's high command, with an iron grip on the party. One is the unquestioned supreme leader; the other, a strongman and strategist. They hold sway, not only among the cadres, but even in the party's ideological fountainhead, the RSS.

It was the Congress party that established the original 'high command'. Its powers were entrenched during the time of Indira Gandhi, as the former prime minister gained absolute control of the party, with no room for dissent. Congress continued to hold its flock together under Sonia Gandhi during the two UPA governments – she was the party's *de facto* high command. Inscrutable, astute, and aloof, she exercised power through loyalists such as Ahmed Patel.

Now, the power structures of the party are cracking under an idealist at its helm – Rahul Gandhi, the reluctant crown-prince. As Congress drifts rudderless, the high command has been reduced to a ceremonial body, neither feared by a host of leaders who pursue their own factional and regional interests, nor held in high esteem by the party men.

Take the Karnataka situation. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah repeatedly asserts he will complete his full term and there's no question of any change of guard, while the Deputy Chief Minister, D K Shivakumar, defiantly notes that a deal was indeed struck before the swearing-in, for him to take over as the CM midway through the five-year term. The rift is playing out in public in an ugly face-off between the minions of the two leaders.

It turns farcical when the old warhorse, the elected nominal president of the grand old party, Mallikarjun Kharge, says the high command will have the final word. There has been no credible intervention from the high command that inspires confidence among the people of the state, subjected to this extended leadership tussle.

Capt G R Gopinath (Retd.)
builds bridges, sometimes by tearing down walls. He is a soldier, farmer, and entrepreneur

On the other side of the political spectrum, a question is gaining credence – after Modi, who? The Prime Minister will be 79 at the end of his present term. There has always been speculation on who will inherit his mantle. Will it be Shah, the number two in the power hierarchy, or Yogi Adityanath, the influential Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh? Also, there is Nitin Gadkari, the Minister for Road Transport and Highways from Nagpur, projected in some circles as the RSS' choice.

It was, of course, the RSS' intervention in 2014 which led Modi to the high seat. But in the Modi-Shah era, the RSS does not hold such absolute power, and its prime ministerial pick, if there is one, for the 2029 general election will not be uncontested.

There is also that other question – "After Modi, what?" What kind of legacy is Modi likely to leave behind? Does he desire to leave behind the prototype of a mighty Hindu Rashtra, where minorities and Dalits live as second-class citizens in a society on the edge? Or a genuinely democratic republic? – a developed, vibrant economy with equitable growth, where all are equal under the law and live in dignity, where the politics of appeasement has ended?

Today, Modi invokes Gandhi, Ambedkar, and Vivekananda, and pays homage to Savarkar and Golwalkar. These are two sets of men embodying irreconcilable ideologies. Modi has a little over three years left in his third term – a decisive period in shaping his legacy. What road will he take?

None of this, of course, is to discard the possibility of the man putting his hand up for another term. Modi has often projected himself as someone not chasing power – "I'm a *fakir*; I will walk away with my *jhola*", he once said. History, however, is replete with rulers eager to hold on to power until incapacitated or overthrown. "We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means; it is an end," George Orwell wrote in *1984*.

Modi remains India's most charismatic and popular leader. He has lost none of his verve or oratorical skills. His political instincts are sharp, and his drive to win elections is intact, backed by the organisational muscle of a massive, cadre-driven party.

But these traits appear more pronounced also because of the uncertainties that define the principal opposition party and its leadership. Optics matter in a battle of perceptions. Who commands the forces, and who is *seen* as commanding them, can determine a party's future.

KNOWN UNKNOWNS

Gold, oil, and the fragility of sovereignty

Gopichand Katragadda
The former CTO of Tata Group and founder of AI company Myelin Foundry is driven to peel off known facts to discover unknown layers
@Gkatragadda

I spent this past Christmas and New Year's Eve walking through Lima, Cusco, and finally Machu Picchu with family. Peru is breathtaking, but it is also unsettling. Beneath its beauty lies a civilisational wound that never quite healed. You feel it most clearly when you revisit the story of the Inca empire and the moment it met Francisco Pizarro.

This was not a heroic clash of equals. It was an ambush.

When Pizarro arrived in 1532, the Inca emperor Atahualpa ruled an empire of astonishing scale and sophistication. Roads, granaries, astronomy, and administration bound the Andes together. Gold, central to the Inca culture, was not money. It was sacred: the sweat of the sun. Pizarro understood none of this and did not need to. He understood extraction.

At Cajamarca, Atahualpa was lured into a meeting under the guise of diplomacy and was captured in a sudden, brutal attack. Thousands of unarmed retainers were slaughtered. The divine king was imprisoned. What followed is one of history's most grotesque transactions: Atahualpa offered to fill a room with gold and silver in exchange for his freedom.

The ransom was paid in full. Temples were stripped. Sacred objects were melted down. An entire cosmology was reduced to bullion. Atahualpa was executed anyway, on charges of fratricide, a debated accusation, and an internal matter his captors weaponised.

This is worth stating plainly: the conquistadors did not break a deal. They never believed that one existed. Agreements, morality, and even sovereignty only applied within their own civilisational frames. To the external aggressor, the Inca were not equals. They were an inconvenience sitting on top of valuable resources.

Gold was the 16th century's ultimate prize. Oil has played the same role for the last hundred years.

Petroleum has powered economies and reordered global power itself. Control over oil has determined currencies, wars, coups, and the very definition of sovereignty.

In this light, Venezuela is not an aberration. It is a continuation. The country holds the largest proven oil reserves in the world, estimated at over 300 billion barrels. At its peak, oil accounted for more than 90% of its export earnings. For decades, that wealth underwrote social programmes, national pride, and political autonomy. But oil also painted a target on the country's back. In the modern world order, resource-rich nations that insist on sovereignty are rarely left alone. They are sanctioned, isolated, destabilised, or "rescued" in the name of higher principles that curiously align with strategic interests.

The pattern is familiar. External pressure intensifies. Financial systems are weaponised. Parallel markets emerge. Assets are frozen. Narratives are shaped. Eventually, intervention is framed as inevitable or even benevolent. This is not about excusing governance failures or idealising regimes. That framing itself is part of the problem. It quietly shifts attention away from the central fact: powerful external actors consistently behave as predators when strategic resources are involved.

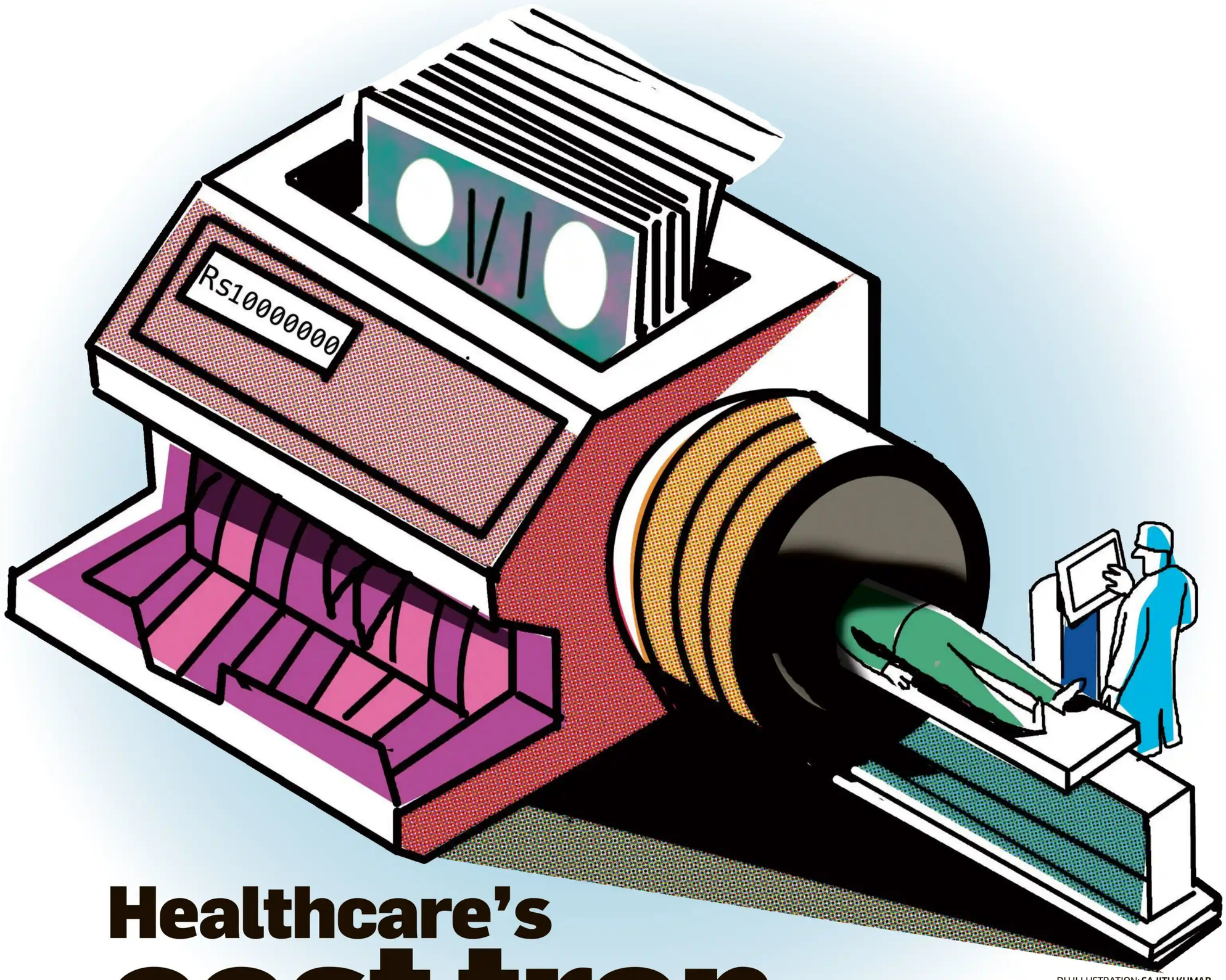
The oil century has refined this art. The petrodollar system tied energy to global finance, ensuring that access to oil, and, therefore, national survival for many countries, ran through institutions dominated by a handful of powers. Sanctions now achieve what cannon fire once did. Currency replaces cavalry. Markets succeed muskets.

Pizarro did not ask whether the Inca governed perfectly. He did not debate legitimacy or reform. He saw gold, weakness, opportunity, and acted. Modern geopolitics prefers a better language, but the instinct is unchanged. Oil, like gold, becomes the justification after the decision has already been made.

Peru lives with the consequences of this history. The Inca empire did not simply fall; it was dismantled. Knowledge systems were erased. Wealth was extracted. Society was reordered to serve distant interests. The ruins of Machu Picchu are relatively well-preserved because they were cut off. But the voices that built it were never allowed to finish their story.

Venezuela is not silent yet, but the danger is the same. When a nation's primary wealth becomes the object of external appetite, sovereignty becomes conditional. The question is no longer what people want, but what others will allow.

History is often written as tragedy softened by hindsight. Walking through Peru, it is impossible to miss the lesson that is carved into stone: civilisations are not destroyed because they are imperfect. They are destroyed because someone stronger decides their wealth is better used elsewhere. Gold did that to the Inca. Oil threatens to do the same today to any society whose wealth becomes more valuable than its voice.



DH ILLUSTRATION: SAJITH KUMAR

Healthcare's cost trap

India's healthcare challenge extends beyond underfunding to unchecked excess, marked by inflated bills, unnecessary tests and surgeries, insurance-led overtreatment and opacity in private hospitals. This calls for firmer regulation and ethical oversight, writes Abantika Ghosh

Faridabad resident Rakesh (*name changed*) took a family member for gall bladder surgery at a tony South Delhi hospital and was given an estimate of Rs 2.30 lakh. But at the time of discharge, the total invoice of Rs 3.90 lakh sent him reeling. When the bill was scrutinised, it was found that the patient had been separately billed for the removal of the gall bladder and for the removal of the adhesions around the organ, without which its extraction is not possible. The OT-charges, consumables, all had been billed twice over!

Abantika Ghosh

The arrival of a bill at a corporate hospital is no less scary than the disease and its diagnosis, and Rakesh was one among many Indians who have been through this shock. Yet, this extravagant side of Indian healthcare does not get as much policy attention as it deserves. For decades, the magic number in Indian healthcare has been 2.5 — the GDP percentage deemed ideal for India's public healthcare spend. The 2025–26 Union Budget allocation for the ministries of health, AYUSH and other related ministries stood at 0.33% of GDP. This disparity set the context for healthcare conversations, which have traditionally been framed around deficiencies — resources, manpower, facilities. But there is another side to it: excesses — overtesting, overmedication, surgeries that may not be strictly essential, add-on procedures that inflate surgical expenses, equipment rentals that allow room for corporate profiteering — the list goes on.

From billboards to ICUs

If that sounds counterintuitive, think of the umpteen billboards you encounter every day advertising the latest technology and sophisticated medtech devices acquired by prominent hospital chains. These acquisitions are not for charity; these are investments hospitals make, and there is often an intention to extract returns from patients — who else? The entry, over the last couple of decades, of multinational investors into the Indian private hospital space bears testimony to how lucrative the sector is.

Much has happened in the last few years to cover ground on India's goal of Universal Health Coverage (UHC), including the roll-out and expansion of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) in 2018, which promised an annual health cover of Rs 5 lakh to all eligible families. A recent amendment has entitled people over 70 years of age, irrespective of financial background, to the same cover under PMJAY.

However, in the hands of unscrupulous private hospital owners, it has become yet another tool of overtreatment, widening the horizons of what in insurance parlance is known as moral hazard, beyond traditional procedures such as hysterectomies and Caesarean sections.

In one case in a city in western India, a hospital performed angioplasties on PMJAY patients even though they were not medically indicated. Some patients who underwent the procedure to remove blockages in blood vessels actually had zero blockage. The matter came to light after two people died. Moral hazard in insurance is defined as the propensity of an insured person to take more risks than necessary. In healthcare, it manifests as hospitals prescribing unnecessary tests and interventions to insured patients, thus depleting coverage without any material health gains. That this might be happening under PMJAY was flagged recently by BJP MP Darshan Singh Choudhary in the Lok Sabha. "Once a patient is admitted, his money vanishes, but full treatment does not happen," he said, arguing for stricter norms in the scheme to counter the "monopoly of private hospitals".

There may indeed be a need to scrutinise package utilisation under the scheme more closely. Acute febrile illness — in other words, fever — is among the top five packages claimed since the scheme's inception in 2018. Hospitalisation for fever alone is not very common, particularly among uninsured patients. The excesses an admitted patient is subjected to can range from unnecessary tests to overpriced drugs and unindicated surgeries.

Refer-and-earn commissions?

Insured patients exhausting their coverage is one part of the conversation around excesses in healthcare. It becomes starker for patients who do not require hospitalisation because, except in rare cases, this expenditure is entirely out of pocket.

The biggest components of outpatient healthcare expenses are laboratory tests and medicines. The pricing dynamics of pathological tests contain a significant element of doctors' commissions. This is problematic for two reasons. First, patients pay a markup so laboratories can recover this additional expense. Second, it hinges on the information asymmetry doctors possess — one of the reasons economist Kenneth Arrow argued against applying standard market economics to healthcare. If a doctor stands to benefit financially from each test prescribed, who oversees which tests are essential and which are driven by incentives?

Dr Arun Gadre, a gynaecologist and author, has spent a lifetime advocating ethical medicine. His book Dissenting Diagnosis, based on interviews with 78 doctors, lays bare the extent of corruption in healthcare. Speaking about excessive tests and why they cost so much, Dr Gadre says: "One pathologist told me that he would not survive if he did not give commissions to referring doctors. India allows medical technology without regulation or assessment of necessity. There is zero accountability for doctors and hospitals. Redress is left to patients through consumer courts, and that process is tedious."

David Berger, an Australian primary care physician, spent time in India in 2012–13. He documented this practice of referral commissions in a scathing *BMJ* article, noting that all investigations attracted a 10–15% kickback to the referring doctor. While researching my book, a senior doctor who began his career in a government hospital in central Delhi recalled that, a couple of decades ago, young resident doctors earned nearly 33% of their monthly salaries from commissions from nearby pathology labs.

A veteran in the pathology business spoke of "small diaries" doctors maintain to track referrals for which labs owe them commissions. The amounts vary across cities and consultants, depending on patient volume and competition. The chain he now heads has built its diagnostic business on refusing to pay commissions and passing on the benefit to patients. As a result, its tests are significantly cheaper than those of competitors.

A case of more for more

Incentive dynamics are similar for drugs: more prescriptions mean higher costs. A study published last year in the Indian Journal of Medical Research by ICMR researchers found that the most common consequence of deviant prescriptions was increased cost, observed in 63% of prescriptions analysed. The implications go beyond cost — unnecessary medications can cause side effects, often requiring additional drugs to manage them. The Uniform Code for Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices prohibits pharmaceutical companies from offering gifts or travel incentives to doctors (with limited exceptions), yet the practice remains rampant. One company even approached the Supreme Court seeking income tax benefits for freebies given to doctors. Prescription audits are rare in India, leaving medical ethics as the only defence patients have against inflated out-of-pocket drug expenses.

One surgery too many

"*Dar bikta hai* (fear sells)," says Dr Gadre, summing up excesses in healthcare — from hysterectomies and cataract surgeries to angioplasties and Caesarean sections. He attributes this to weak ethics and the rise of profit-driven corporate healthcare. The root cause, he says, is the absence of enforceable regulations and protocols for prescribing tests, drugs and interventions. "Some individuals and hospitals practise ethical medicine; charitable hospitals do excellent work. But corporate hospitals thrive on excess. There are no incentives for ethical practice," he adds.

Non-essential surgeries rising

Thousands of Indians wait for life-saving surgeries because they cannot afford private care. At AIIMS Delhi, waits can stretch to two years. Ironically, India also performs a large number of non-essential surgeries, with surgical births topping the list. Urban India has an alarmingly high Caesarean rate; nationally, it stands at 32%, according to NFHS-5. The public–private divide is stark: 49% of private-sector births are surgical, compared to 22% in government facilities.

State-wise variations are startling. In urban Tripura, 47.55% of births are C-sections — 95% in private and 40% in government hospitals. In urban Andhra Pradesh, the rate is 50% (66% private, 30% government), while in urban J&K it stands at 54%, with private facilities accounting for a worrying 91%. The WHO considers 25% the ideal rate for medically warranted C-sections.

India also sees excessive hysterectomies. NFHS data suggests over 3% of Indian women have undergone the procedure, two-thirds in private hospitals. The Supreme Court noted this in 2023, directing the government to ensure implementation of guidelines. A 2019 Thomson Reuters investigation found 66.8% hysterectomies in India were unnecessary, with 95% occurring in the private sector. NHA data shows 2% of PMJAY claims were for uterus removals, concentrated in six states.

Shrouded in opacity

Decisions on surgery are cloaked in opacity. Guidelines exist, but without statutory backing or monitoring, adherence is weak, leading to catastrophic healthcare costs. In a Tier-I corporate hospital, a laparoscopic hysterectomy can cost up to Rs 5 lakh, depending on bed type.

In a 2023 Indian Journal of Nephrology article, Dr Sanjay Nagral of Jaslok Hospital flagged that nearly 10% of organ transplants in India involved foreigners — high by global standards — almost exclusively in the private sector. This persists despite thousands of Indians awaiting transplants due to donor shortages. He notes that the tendency to overoperate is endemic across specialities.

"It is not difficult to see why private healthcare globally encourages more procedures. Unfortunately, this includes invasive surgeries with risks of complications. In India, perverse incentives, weak regulation, poor auditing and low patient awareness make it worse," says Dr Nagral.

Opacity extends beyond clinical decisions into the operating theatre. In corporate setups, patients often cannot verify what procedures were actually performed. In surgeries like piles, only the surgeon knows how many growths were treated or which techniques were used. Multiple procedures may be billed under different justifications, leaving patients with no way to verify. The responsibility to protect patients lies with the state, ideally through a regulator empowered to act against errant doctors and hospitals.

This conversation on excesses must be addressed before India can realistically achieve universal healthcare. With private participation inevitable for a population of 1.4 billion, unchecked profiteering will drain public resources unless costs and protocols are rationalised.

The author is a journalist and public policy professional. Her second book, Games Hospitals Play (Bloomsbury 2025), deals with the brass tacks of healthcare inflation in the private sector. Views are personal.

> In a recent case in western India, a hospital performed angioplasties on PMJAY patients even though they were not medically indicated. Some patients who underwent the procedure actually had zero blockage.

Feedback from our readers

We love to hear what you think of the articles you read. Here is a selection of responses we have received in recent weeks. *(Responses have been edited for brevity and clarity.)* Write to us at **dhonsunday@deccanherald.co.in**

This refers to the article **'Zero posting, peak living?'** (Big Picture/Dec 21). This is an essential and trending topic. A growing Gen Z trend of "zero posting" reflects social media fatigue and a conscious withdrawal from lives driven by validation. Many young people are choosing to live fully in the moment rather than curate experiences for likes and approval. This shift prioritises mental well-being, privacy, and authenticity over constant visibility. The decline in posting signals maturity — confidence that life need not be publicly certified to feel meaningful.

P V Prakash, Mumbai

This is in reference to the article **'The Empathy Edge'** (Big Picture/Dec 8). It has brought home the obvious fact that women in the workplace are a highly sobering influence, and it is the emotional intelligence that they bring to bear on the working sphere that enables the wheels of offices, factories, and other workplaces turn smoothly, with the atmosphere easing up quite a bit. Their role often goes unrecognised, but it is a fact that their contribution is invaluable and they really do provide an empathetic edge.

C V Aravind

The article on gratitude (**The weight of thanks** - Big Picture/Dec 15) is the need of the hour. Thanks is a small word, but many don't say it. In fact, some take advantage of kind souls and have no gratitude and therefore no thanks, too.

Margaret Rajan, Bengaluru

This is about the article **'Zero posting, peak living?'** (Big Picture/Dec 21). Thanks for writing about this important topic. There is a huge disconnect between science/philosophy/spiritual language and society, because of which people are getting misled by these social media platforms. What you are doing is a great service to society through these thoughtful and informative write-ups.

Dasagrandhi Charan

This is with reference to the story titled **'The Empathy Edge'** (Big Picture/Dec 8). This story is very touching. Every woman that I have met has had this unique quality of carrying an unseen burden with them, yet quietly moving on with their tasks or activities steadily, calmly and attentively. When we women share our anxieties, it is not only heard and understood but also, more or less, it is felt as if it was a part of our lives too, it weaves into us and leaves us connected. I would like to wholeheartedly appreciate the author for this beautiful and soulful writing that strongly emphasises that this unique collective ability that women possess by their lived experiences actually brings emotional intelligence and communal intuition into work culture. This is a truth that has to be accepted and appreciated by this patriarchal society that we live in!

Kavitha Manoj

ASTROSPEAK

Guruji Shrii Arnav

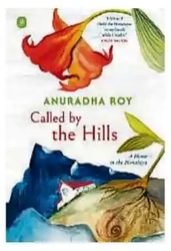
Scan the QR code to read the ***weekly horoscope***

Here is a quietly luminous memoir that settles into mountain time, where daily life unfolds in an unspoken intimacy with the land itself, writes Sheila Kumar

Learning to LISTEN

The author takes us through her lived experiences, joys and sorrows of living in the hills. Seen here is the view of a misty morning in Ranikhet.

First, it's a memoir that takes us on a leisurely wander through the forests and dirt tracks of Ranikhet, where the author has lived for a quarter of a century now. Second, it has the most luscious illustrations ever, all done by the author, giving us a clear picture of just what she is talking about. And third, there's a surprise bonus, six postcards tucked away in a sleeve on the inside of the back cover, which we will happily pore over, again and again.



CALLED BY THE HILLS
Anuradha Roy
Hachette,
pp 171, Rs 999

The dedication is to a beloved dog, Jerry, who was picked up by a leopard literally in front of Roy's eyes. The horror, the dismay, and the sense of loss are all gently touched upon, even as the grief comes through loud and clear.

There is a quote from the Chinese author Li Bai (Li Po) that ends like this...

We sit together, the mountain and me,
Until only the mountain remains.

Roy tells us she and her partner, who is referred to as R through the book, live in what was the cowshed of a sprawling estate. Some amount of renovation later, it became their home as well as the site of their publishing concern. R and I run a small publishing house, she states dryly, that is, we publish books from our small house. Using a light, chatty tone, disarming us with her no-frills style of narration, Roy takes us through her lived experiences, joys and sorrows of living in the hills.

The first glimpse of snow-clad mountains from the windows of their cottage, shining white and blue, five times bigger than the hills at their base; the exact bend in the road where the air turns to champagne.

The process of dissuading scorpions and snakes in their quest for rent-free accommodation in the cottage; the art of keeping leopards at bay, which involves talking loudly, groaning, singing, coughing, and carrying a torch. Connectivity problems when the bytes "can't climb the mountains", renovations taking forever because the roads have been washed away by rain, or because of a melancholic buffalo delaying the plumber.

The area around (the cottage) fell into a forest of pine, oak, and rhododendron, where the ground was covered with ferns and wildflowers.

Roy wanted to carve a small garden from the wilderness and really put her back into it, learning to handle manure, soil, and seeds. You need to feel things with your fingers: real maalis never wear gloves, she points out. We meet the Ancient, a doughty old woman who seems to have come with the cottage they now own, whose husband, better travelled than her, when asked whether he liked living in Ranikhet, would say, "Personally, I prefer Antwerp."

We meet Mr Singh, director of the government orchard, and adopt his addictive refrain, sophar-sogud. We meet all their dogs, from Barauni Junction and Biscoot to Jerry. We meet the man on the train who describes how his 200-year-old Tehri town went underwater when a giant dam came up to supply electricity to the plains. We meet Sundar and his wife, who point out direct evidence of climate change and global warming, with the author adding that temperatures last year touched 40 degrees in some parts of the mountains. Then we meet the various birds that flit in and out of her garden. The whistling thrush, the barbets, sparrows, magpies, woodpeckers, tits, and blackbirds.

It's not altogether a rosy picture, though; Roy tells us of the severe drought-like conditions, the gardens drying up for lack of water, the flowers wilting and withering, the townswomen (yes, it's always the women) standing in line to fill up buckets when the corporation water comes through. The monsoons, too, are deconstructed for us: a time the sky cracks like an eggshell as lightning strikes, trees fall, chunks of hillsides crumble, giant boulders plummet onto roads from slopes above. Sophar-sobad, in other words.

Roy talks of how she feels a bit disoriented when she has to go down to the plains when a new book of hers is out. I hide in a different wardrobe and personality at such times.... and return with infinite relief to the silence of the forests and mountains and the people who do not read, she says with an air of finality.

For all the Miss Read charm that underpins the book, what comes through is that this kind of enforced solitude is not for everyone; it is the life she and R have chosen, though, and they thrive in it.

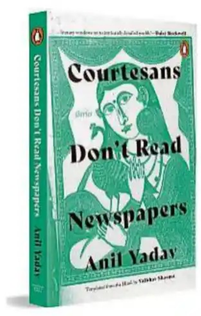
There is a pertinent quote from writer/historian/activist Shekhar Pathak that the mountains cannot be treated as the prerogative of any one community, religions or belief. ...it is a unique example of the unity of humankind. Indeed, a credo we would be wise to hold onto.

Tales that hold a mirror to social rot

This is a satirical examination of hypocrisy and power that reveals uneasy truths hidden beneath India's everyday realities, writes Chittajit Mitra

India is a country of contradictions, with a society trying to hold on to its orthodox ways while conveniently adapting modernity as per its will — or at least pretending to. It was Tagore who called out a section of our society, reminiscing about dead history rather than moving forward with the times. Anil Yadav, in Courtesans Don't Read Newspapers, shifts our focus back to these contradictions and poses questions to us as a society.

Translated from Hindi by Vaibhav Sharma, the book consists of a novella and five short stories. The novella, originally titled *Nagarvadhuyein Akhbaar Nahi Padhti*, reveals the hypocritical nature of our society, where a police official, Ramashankar Tripathi, suddenly takes it upon himself to push sex workers out of the locality of Manduadih.



COURTESANS DON'T READ NEWSPAPERS
Anil Yadav
Penguin, pp 224,
Rs 299

A decision not inspired by archaic morality, but instead a ploy to clear his image from the collective memory of the public, as he is suspected of having killed his wife, Lovely Tripathi. When a photojournalist tries to unravel the truth, we witness an unholy collaboration between the corrupt police official, local politicians, and even the corporate media.

In The Road to the Other World, the narrator goes down memory lane to a time when he was just a child, playing with pebbles and imagining them to be his cows. Soon, his interaction with his mother's sister, who suffered from tuberculosis, takes centre stage. He was still too young to understand the gravity of her situation and goes on to narrate how he continued playing with her even as she grew weaker by the day. The story reveals unfair gender roles and the discrimination that stems from them.

In the times we live in, a title like Lord Almighty, Grant Us Riots! would worry us, but the author ensures that from the very first paragraph, we are pulled into the world of Mominpura, an overlooked locality in Varanasi. The setup of this story recalls the old parts of several cities where people live in terrible conditions, with poor sewage systems, and where even the most basic necessities are neglected.

The same is the case here — a Muslim ghetto surviving amid crumbling infrastructure.

As the monsoon arrives, the low-lying area begins to flood due to its proximity to a river, while also receiving garbage from the entire city. The floods bring deadly diseases, resulting in many deaths, mostly of children.

The apathetic administration proves useless, and eventually, people realise that the only way out of this mess is to have a riot — the only time the administration would pay any heed to a locality like Mominpura.

One of the most common criticisms of translation is that the text somewhat 'loses' its originality when rendered into another language. While this criticism holds some merit, we often come across books like this one that reaffirm the desperate need to transcend linguistic limitations and share such stories with a wider readership.

Anil Yadav's stories in Courtesans Don't Read Newspapers are reality checks for readers and do not pretend to be gentle or palatable. Instead, they are thrown in one's face unabashedly, forcing readers to reassess reality and simply look around to trace these narratives. He cleverly uses satire to prick our sensitivities back to life, which may have been numbed by the bombardment of communal and sectarian content on social media and even mainstream media.

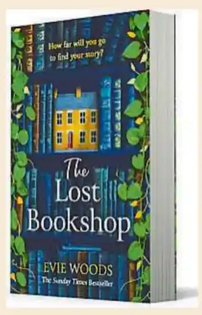
In times when actively and proudly participating in anti-social activities — or even praising them through one's writing — earns fame and recognition backed by high-ranking politicians, these stories present reality as it is, holding a mirror up to society at large. The image we see is not a pretty one.

It is stories like these that demonstrate the richness of literature written in Indian languages and why they need to be translated. Vaibhav Sharma's seamless translation deserves commendation for making this possible.

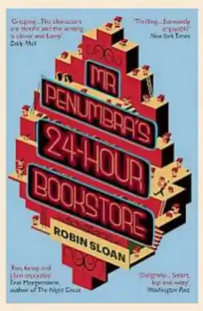
MOODBOARD

Some bookshops sell stories; others are stories themselves. Here are three reads that take you to those shelves where there's comfort and magic both.

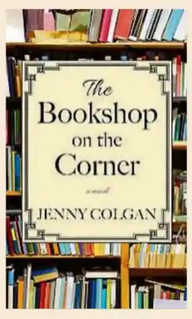
The Lost Bookshop by Evie Woods:
A disappearing bookshop tucked away on a quiet Dublin street? Bring it on. There are lost manuscripts, and lives quietly rearranged by stories. Evie Woods blends folklore, mystery, and emotional healing with an almost fairy-tale softness. This is OG cosy reading with real magic; books that appear when they're needed the most.



Mr Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore by Robin Sloan:
A strange bookstore that never closes, secret societies, coded texts, and a literary puzzle centuries in the making. Playful and clever, this novel mixes cosy bookish charm with an actual mystery, making it ideal for readers who enjoy problem-solving.



The Bookshop On The Corner by Jenny Colgan:
After losing her library job in London, Nina Redmond reinvents herself by converting a van into a travelling bookshop across the Scottish Highlands. Along the way, she discovers quirky communities, unexpected romance (but, of course) and the quiet magic of connecting people with the books they need.



Mood Board *is a column that presents thematic lists of books on hot-button topics.*

INTERVIEW

'Those who troll me don't own my voice'

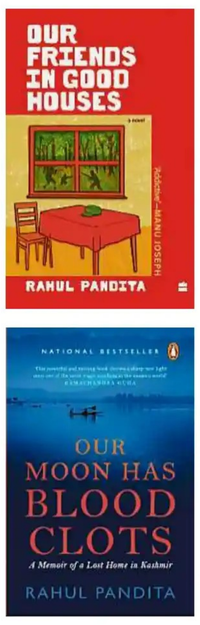
In a chat with Amritesh Mukherjee, author Rahul Pandita reflects on the difficult distance between life and fiction and the risks of speaking plainly in political times

Rahul Pandita

Rahul Pandita is a writer and journalist known for saying it as it is. His works often confront displacement and political power. From Our Moon Has Blood Clots to his recent novel Our Friends in Good Houses, he has, in his writing, resisted both nostalgia and moral shortcuts. In an interview with *DHoS*, Pandita speaks about stepping away from lived memory to let fiction breathe, about the cost of speaking openly on national politics, and about finding peace in running. *Excerpts*

Your novel asked for two big detachments – pulling the protagonist away from yourself and fiction away from lived memory. What was that process like? And did that distance change anything in your sense of yourself as a writer?

Detaching myself from the protagonist and from the gravitational pull of lived memory was difficult, but necessary. I had to let Neel breathe on his own terms, even when some of his wounds overlapped with mine. That distance allowed the novel to find its own emotional truth rather than merely echoing my biography.



And yes, the process shifted something in me. Writing fiction demands a deeper surrender; it forces you to confront what you think you have already processed. In that sense, the novel became a quiet form of self-discovery.

Your choice of third-person narration is intriguing. Were you ever tempted to tell the story another way?

I did experiment briefly with a first-person voice, but it felt too confining for the kind of emotional and political landscape the novel needed to traverse. The third-person vantage allowed me to step back, to hold Neel with a certain tenderness while also observing him with clarity.

A sense of groundlessness and the search for an elusive home run through the book. What is "home" for you?

For me, "home" has never been a fixed geography; it's a longing shaped by exile and memory. "Ungrund" comes closest to describing that condition; it is an inner groundlessness that you learn to live with. Over the years, I've realised that home is not a place I can return to, but a fragile state I build in moments of silence, in relationships that endure, and in the stories I tell.

The novel echoes themes you've explored in your essays. Did writing Neel change how you see your own memories?

Writing Neel didn't change my memories, but it did change my relationship with them. Fiction lets you hold memory at an angle. It lets you see its cracks, its omissions, its stubborn brightness. In giving Neel his past, I was forced to re-examine my own, not to rewrite it but to understand its contours with a little more compassion and a little less certainty.

The novel lingers on the rhythm of life, reading, and writing. How has your own routine evolved?

My routine has become less rigid and more intuitive over the years. Earlier, I chased discipline; now I try to cultivate receptivity. There are days when I'm as distracted as anyone: doomscrolling, drifting, avoiding the page. But I've learned to recognise the small apertures of quiet when they open. That's when I write.

The texture of my writing life today is a mix of deliberate stillness and accidental clarity: early mornings, long runs, a window with some light, and a notebook that gathers thoughts at its own pace in a cafe. I no longer force the rhythm; I listen for it.

You've been more outspoken about national politics recently. How has that experience been? Has that changed how readers respond to your work or your experience as a writer?

Speaking more openly about national politics has been both clarifying and tiring. Clarifying, because it comes from a place of conviction; tiring, because public debate today leaves very little room for nuance. Inevitably, some readers approach my work through the lens of their own political assumptions. But I try not to let that dictate what I write. To those who troll me on X, I want to say that just because you may have bought a copy of my Kashmir memoir does not mean that you own my soul and voice.

You've written about the importance of running in your life, and Neel runs too, often to escape. What role does running play for you?

Running is the closest thing I have to a reset button. It's a physical act that quiets the noise in my head. For that alone, I am indebted to it.

READ OF THE WEEK

Acclaimed journalist and cultural commentator Shefalee Vasudev has spent over 25 years observing and chronicling the intersection of fashion and culture. Who is seen? How are we seen? How do we want to be seen?

In Stories We Wear, Shefalee listens deeply to the language of appearance and examines how it becomes a medium of identity, belonging, even resistance. She journeys through villages, burn wards, cafés, cremation grounds, influencer feeds and more, to ask: What do we signal when we dress for power, humility, rebellion or grief? In the process, she reveals the contradictions woven into the fabric of our lives and modern India: from khadi's contested legacy to the spectacle of airport terminals, from the anti-heroines of Hindi OTT dramas to the seductive mirage of ethical fashion.

A meditation on myth and mirror, fabric and façade, skin and screen, this unusual book examines how we dress our identities, conceal (or reveal) our histories and curate our contradictions — thread by thread, story by story.

Shefalee Vasudev is a journalist, cultural commentator and narrative psychotherapist. The first editor of *Marie Claire India*, she has spent three decades writing and editing across news and lifestyle media. This is her second book.

Sen and sensibility

Aparna Sen stepped into a domain where women's perspectives behind the camera were largely absent, when she directed 36 Chowringhee Lane in 1981. Ever since, her cinema has shown how feminist art can operate as both aesthetic achievement and social intervention, writes Suman Ghosh

Aparna Sen stands as one of Indian cinema's most compelling voices, a filmmaker whose four-decade career has consistently interrogated gender, class, and social power through a distinctly feminist lens. As both a woman navigating a male-dominated industry and an artist committed to centering women's subjectivity, Sen has not merely participated in Indian cinema—she has reshaped conversations around what women's stories can be, who gets to tell them, and how they challenge entrenched patriarchal structures. Her work as director, actor, and public intellectual has made her an indispensable figure in understanding the evolution of feminist cinema in India and the broader politics of women's artistic production.

Sen's emergence as a filmmaker in the 1980s occurred within a specific historical context. The Indian parallel cinema movement had created space for art-house filmmaking that engaged with social realities, yet even within this progressive milieu, women directors remained rare. When Sen directed her debut film 36 Chowringhee Lane (1981), she was entering a field where women's perspectives behind the camera were largely absent. The film itself—a haunting portrait of an ageing Anglo-Indian teacher's loneliness in Calcutta—announced Sen's primary artistic concern: the interior lives of women, particularly those marginalised by age, class, or community. By focusing on Violet Stoneham's dignified suffering and her exploitation by younger characters who use her flat for romantic trysts, Sen examined how society renders certain women invisible while simultaneously taking advantage of their vulnerability. This was not only sympathetic portrayal but structural critique—the film suggested that patriarchy's violence includes abandonment and erasure as much as overt oppression.

Virtuous victims? Not at all

What distinguishes Sen's feminist ideology is its refusal of simplification. Her films consistently present women as complex moral agents rather than virtuous victims or symbols. In Paroma (1984), she explored a middle-class housewife's extramarital affair and the subsequent scandal that destroys her social standing. Rather than moralise, Sen examined the suffocating constraints of bourgeois Bengali respectability and how it polices women's desires and autonomy. The film sparked considerable controversy precisely because it refused to punish its protagonist for transgression; instead, it indicted the social structures that deny women subjectivity beyond their roles as wives and mothers. This approach—treating women's choices, including morally ambiguous ones, as legitimate subjects for serious artistic exploration—was radical for its time and remains central to Sen's feminist vision.

Gaze on marriage, family

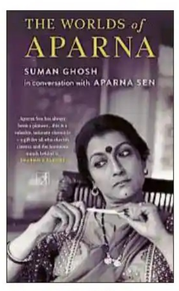
Sen's Yugant (1995) and Paromitar Ek Din (2000) further developed her examination of marriage and family as sites of gendered power. Yugant deconstructed the institution of marriage itself, presenting it not as romantic fulfillment but as a battleground where two individuals struggle for recognition and autonomy. The film's title, meaning "The End of an Era," suggested both the collapse of a marriage and potentially the exhaustion of traditional patriarchal arrangements. Paromitar Ek Din shifted focus to the mother-daughter-in-law relationship, revealing how patriarchy pits women against each other and how women navigate competing loyalties within family structures designed to subordinate them. These films demonstrated Sen's understanding that feminist cinema must examine the complex ways women are implicated in and resist patriarchal systems.

As a social commentator, Sen has used cinema to intervene in contemporary political debates. Mr. and Mrs. Iyer (2002), perhaps her most internationally acclaimed work, addressed Hindu-Muslim communal violence through the story of two strangers—a Hindu woman and Muslim man—who must pretend to be married while traveling through riot-torn India. By framing communal hatred through a gendered lens, Sen revealed how religious fundamentalism and patriarchal control are mutually reinforcing. The film's protagonist, Meenakshi Iyer, undergoes a transformation from sheltered conservatism to moral courage, suggesting that women's liberation and secular humanism are interconnected projects. Sen was making explicit what her work implies: that feminist consciousness cannot be separated from struggles for social justice.

Sen's later films have also engaged with pressing social issues while focusing on women's experiences. 15 Park Avenue (2005) examined schizophrenia and mental illness, centering the relationship between two sisters and refusing to sensationalise mental disability. The Japanese Wife (2010) explored an unconventional long-distance marriage, while Goynar Baksho (2013) used magical realism to trace three generations of Bengali women and their relationship to inheritance, autonomy, and tradition. Throughout, Sen has shown remarkable range while maintaining thematic consistency—her films always ask how women navigate structures designed to limit them, and what forms of resistance, accommodation, or transformation become possible. The feminist ideology in Sen's work is neither dogmatic nor didactic. She has consistently resisted reducing her characters to political symbols, instead presenting them as fully realised individuals whose struggles illuminate larger structures of oppression. Her films trust audiences to grapple with complexity and ambiguity rather than delivering easy answers.

As gender equality debates intensify and women's voices become increasingly central to political discourse, Aparna Sen's work stands as both archive and provocation—her films remain essential viewing for understanding how feminist art can operate as both aesthetic achievement and social intervention.

(The writer is a national award-winning filmmaker and author of The Worlds of Aparna, published by Simon & Schuster India)



Cover of Suman Ghosh's book on Aparna Sen.

Aparna Sen's 1981 directorial which turns the gaze on an Anglo-Indian teacher's loneliness. (PIC: IMDB)

Veteran actor Waheeda Rehman plays an important role in Aparna Sen's 2015 directorial Arshinagar. (PIC COURTESY: IMDB)

DECODED

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AGENDER

When someone identifies as genderless or doesn't specifically identify as female, male or any other gender, the term used to describe them is agender. Many who identify as agender may use the they/them pronouns. They could also use neopronous such as ze/zir or he/she. However, it is important to remember that agender is not the same as asexual.

Agender or non binary?

How different are agender from non binary identities? While people who identity as agender don't belong to any gender, non binary people may have multiple identities — for instance, a person may lean into male identity while also expressing certain aspects of being feminine. Non binary is a term that describes anyone who doesn't solely identify as male or female or by any other specific gender identities. Agender people are just one category that belong to the broader non binary bracket. Non binary people need not necessarily be agender; they could be genderfluid as well.

Agender Pride

Agender Pride Day is celebrated every year on May 19, a day that has been earmarked to raise awareness about people who identify as being genderless. The Agender Flag was designed by a Tumblr (a social media platform) user in 2014, and has black, white, grey and green in it.

(Curated by Savitha Karthik)

Travel

Uma Kannan goes on an arduous and spiritually uplifting journey to Kailash-Mansarovar and comes back with images of prayer flags and snow peaks etched in her mind

ON TOP OF the world

"There is a kind of magicness about going far away and then coming back all changed." This is a famous quote from the American author Kate Douglas Wiggin's 'New Chronicles of Rebecca'.

I don't know about the latter part of the quote but I can say 'there is a kind of magicness' in Kailash.

In 2025, the government in China opened the Kailash-Mansarovar route to Indians, after five years. On a whim, I decided to explore this sacred mountain in Western Tibet. Mount Kailash is located in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China. The visa is processed as a part of group application through an authorised tour operator. (Important tip: Choose your tour operator wisely. Also, it is up to the visa issuing authorities to grant a visa or reject it.)

I knew that I would be visiting tough, rugged terrain with unpredictable weather. But little did I imagine that the journey to the Mount Kailash region right from Kathmandu would be more challenging than the actual Kailash kora (an approximately 52-kilometre pilgrimage route or parikrama around Mount Kailash).

Though there are a couple of routes to travel to Mount Kailash from India (Nathu La Pass, Sikkim, and via the Lipulekh Pass in Uttarakhand), the more common route is via Nepal, either by road or by helicopter. Unfortunately, exactly 45 days before our trip, the Friendship Bridge in Nepal, a crucial crossing over River Bhotekoshi, which connects Nepal and Tibet region, was swept away by flash floods.

From Kathmandu, we reached Kodari, which was officially opened for the Kailash yatra. It was from here that we started our trek towards the Nepal-Tibet border. You would have to cross Tatopani and Kodari towns to reach the Tibetan border. The beauty of these towns was mesmerising — the journey from Tatopani to the Tibet border was an engrossing one, with the entire stretch surrounded by waterfalls.

The north face of Mount Kailash, which is among the most coveted of views. (PHOTOS BY AUTHOR)

Heavenly Tibet

After our Chinese immigration, we began our onward journey toward Nyalam County, a very beautiful small town in Tibet. This was the route designated for the Kailash yatra after a bridge collapsed on the Gyirong route. Nyalam has an elevation of 3,750m and it is from here that we started our high-altitude journey, taking in the stunning landscapes and spectacular views of the Himalayas.

Because a gradual ascent is preferred, those who take this route typically stay at Nyalam, and proceed towards Saga. En route, you get to drive along the mighty Brahmaputra and also feast your eyes on Peiku Tso Lake, one of the most beautiful lakes located at 4,595m. Though it is a nearly seven-hour drive, good roads and views of snow-clad mountains and valleys ensure that you never get tired.

Lalung La Pass on the Friendship Highway (the 800-kilometre route in Tibet connecting Lhasa to the Nepal border,) offers stunning views and you can take in the entire Tibetan plateau from here. The high altitude may give you the feeling that it's an endless journey but you wouldn't want to trade the beauty of the panoramic Himalayan ranges for anything.

Saga (4,640m) is a bustling town and an important stopover for pilgrims visiting Mount Kailash. With many hotels and shops, pilgrims and tourists throng this place to buy essentials for Kailash kora. Our excitement continued as we were just two stops away from Kailash-Lake Mansarovar (known as Mapam Yumtso, a freshwater lake) and Darchen (a small town in Ngari, western Tibet).

And finally, Mansarovar

Lake Mansarovar is truly divine — the stillness and the star-filled night sky casting reflections in the water, will transport you to another world. Even as you take in the sheer beauty of Lake Mansarovar, head to Lake Rakshastal. Though Lake Mansarovar and Rakshastal are just four km apart, they are distinct — the latter is known as Ravana Tal, ('Lake of the Demon'), and is saline. While birds and fish thrive at Mansarovar, there's none around Rakshastal, which is also marked by a lack of vegetation around.

Sights of Mount Kailash

From Mansarovar, we proceeded to Darchen. It took us seven days to get here, and a three-day kora or parikrama (circumabulation) started from Yam dwar, known as the 'Gateway of the God of Death'.

At Yam dwar, you can spot the south face of Mount Kailash (provided there is no heavy snow or thick fog). The west face comes into view as you walk further. As the first day of the parikrama comes to a close, and you reach Dirapuk monastery (approximately 5,200m), you are rewarded with the sight of the most well-known northern face of Mount Kailash. Temperatures swing dramatically, from extreme cold to rain, sunshine and strong winds. The light of sunrise and sunset strike the peak and it shimmers like gold, and hence the name 'gold face'.

On the second day, considered the most challenging, you get to Zuthulpuk via the Dolma La Pass, the highest point of the pilgrimage. From here, you descend to Gauri kund. The east face of Kailash is visible from here. After an overnight stay, you can return to Darchen, which takes a couple of hours. Irrespective of how long you travel and how many kilometres you manage to walk, the sight of prayer flags and snow-capped Mount Kailash will be etched in the memories of travellers. Its stunning beauty and experience are beyond bliss.

CHECKLIST

- Travel agencies have started opening registrations for Kailash Mansarovar yatra 2026 (anywhere between May and October).
- Before you begin your Mount Kailash visit, prioritise acclimatisation so that you can prevent any altitude sickness. Acclimatisation is the process of adjusting your body to high altitudes where oxygen levels are low.
- You need a Tibet travel permit and a China group visa to enter the region. Typically, tour agents take care of the documentation and all you need to do is follow their instructions.
- You can reach Kailash by road, helicopter or air. You can also choose aerial darshan. While shorter helicopter tours are available from Lucknow, air routes start with a flight to Lhasa, following which you can cover the distance by road.
- Costs can range between Rs 3 lakh and Rs 4 lakh depending on your mode of travel.
- Don't miss the colourful lights at Lake Manasarovar in early mornings (from 2.30 to 4 am).

HOW READY ARE YOU?

- Now is the time to put on your walking shoes and begin basic breathing exercises. If you think it's too early, think again – a six-month preparation is a must for a hassle-free journey. Since the trip involves high altitudes, you need to walk on challenging terrain.
- Select proper hiking boots; use two trekking poles for balance.
- Maintain a slow, steady pace.
- Thermal wear, a warm pullover, waterproof jacket, hat, UV protection sunglasses, and gloves are a must. Pack minimal clothes.
- Carry high-energy snacks such as dry fruits.
- Ensure you carry a lightweight durable duffel bag.
- Since the journey involves challenging terrain, give importance to mental preparation as well.

The Mansarovar Lake.

Tatopani is a charming stopover in Nepal, and offers picturesque views.

Konkan classics on a plantain leaf.

MALVANI cuisine, in the main

Blending Goa's Portuguese influences, Karnataka's fiery southern notes, and Maharashtra's earthy warmth, cuisine from the Sindhudurg region tells a story of its own, writes Shikha Shah

Tucked away on Maharashtra's sun-drenched Konkan coast, just over 125 km from Goa's Dabolim airport, Sindhudurg feels like a well-kept secret, offering a gentle exhale from the rush of everyday life. Beyond its sea-girded fortresses, palm-fringed beaches, lush nature trails, and local art forms lies a culinary scene waiting to be discovered.

On a warm, languid afternoon at an eco-friendly villa retreat in Bhogwe village, we step into the world of Malvani cooking right in the comfort of our two-bedroom pool villa with sweeping sea views.

Kokum is widely used as a souring agent in Konkan cuisine.

As the resort staff — locals from nearby villages — arrange the ingredients for our class, the conversation turns to Malvani food and its roots. "To understand Malvani cuisine is to taste the geography of India's western shore," one of them said.

A mix of flavours

Born in the humble kitchens of fishermen and farmers, Malvani cuisine has evolved through centuries of trade and cultural exchange. The Marathas once ruled these lands, but Portuguese and Arab traders introduced spices — cloves, cinnamon, pepper — that transformed simple coastal fare into the fiery, aromatic cuisine known today. Meals are still served on banana leaves and eaten by hand — not merely tradition, but connection.

Though often grouped under the broader Konkani umbrella, Malvani cuisine stands apart for its smoky depth, bold heat, and bright acidity.

"The heart of every Malvani kitchen is its spice box," says Suman Bange, a local home cook turned chef at a villa. The signature Malvani masala — a potent blend of cumin, coriander, dried red chillies, pepper, cloves, and cinnamon — forms the base of most dishes. Cardamom, dagad phool (stone flower), and fennel add nuance, while coconut and kokum remain the cuisine's defining pillars. Recipes are rarely written; they're passed down by taste, intuition, and memory," Bange says.

According to culinary expert and chef Reetu Uday Kugaji, seafood lies at the core of Malvani cooking, reflecting the rhythm of coastal life. Prawns, crabs, bombil, surmai, and tisrya (clams) feature in everyday meals, often simmered in aromatic coconut gravies. The vegetarian repertoire is equally traditional and soulful, celebrating ingredients like jackfruit, colocasia, and lentils cooked with regional masalas.

The cooking methods used for Malavani cuisine are deeply traditional — tawa frying for seafood, slow simmering of gravies to deepen spice infusion, wood-fired cooking in clay pots (still used in villages for a smoky finish) and fermentation for pickles and chutneys.

Seafood to sweet finale

Our cooking class kicks off with a true coastal classic — rawa fried fish. Fresh local catch — often surmai (kingfish) or bangda (mackerel) — is bathed in a tangy-spicy marinade of turmeric, red chilli, garlic, and lime juice. Under Suman's watchful eye, I gently coat each fillet in semolina (rawa) before hitting the pan. The magic happens as it turns golden and crisp, the crust crackling against tender, flaky flesh inside. Served hot with a squeeze of lime and a scattering of coriander, it's the perfect appetiser to wake up the senses.

Then arrives the undeniable showstopper — Malvani prawn curry. This dish captures the very soul of the coast, a luscious coconut-based gravy layered with the fiery depth of Malvani masala. Juicy prawns are briefly marinated, then simmered in a fragrant mix of onions, garlic, dried chillies, and fresh coconut paste.

While seafood and meats are popular, many Malvani families observe strict vegetarianism during festivals or fasting periods, resulting in a rich repertoire of vegetarian dishes that use lentils, jackfruit, colocasia leaves, and indigenous vegetables.

Our veggie star for lunch is tambadi bhaji — a simple yet stunning stir-fry of red amaranth leaves. The deep purple greens sizzle with mustard seeds, garlic, green chillies, and freshly grated coconut, creating a dish that's equal parts earthy and sweet. It's a Konkan staple that brings balance, colour, and a touch of home-style warmth to the spread.

Finally, it was time to savour the fruits of our labour. Our traditional Malvani spread looks like a celebration of flavour and contrast — humble yet indulgent. Alongside what we'd prepared were comforting bowls of varan dal — a simple, soul-satisfying yellow lentil dish made with toor dal, turmeric, and a fragrant tempering of ghee, mustard seeds, and curry leaves. Steaming bhaat (short-grain local rice) sat beside a crunchy koshimbir — a cucumber and peanut salad with a zesty splash of lime — and a variety of papads and homemade achaar to add that essential zing.

Solkadhi is a drink made from kokum and coconut milk.

No Malvani meal is complete without a chilled glass of sol kadhi — that signature pink-hued digestive made from kokum and coconut milk, seasoned with garlic and green chilli. Cool, tangy, and soothing, it refreshes the senses and perfectly balances the region's bold coastal spices. And then, the sweet finale — the modak, stuffed with jaggery and coconut, soft and fragrant with rice flour.

The Malvani cooking class in our villa kitchen was not just about food. That afternoon of cooking offered a glimpse into a story that began centuries ago — and still simmers in every kitchen along the Konkan coast.

A GUD DEAL

KAVITA KANAN CHANDRA

The versatile, unrefined sugar — gud, gur, vellum, bellam, bella, sharkara or jaggery — is an age-old natural sweetener.

From indigenous medicine to a household sweetener, gur carries centuries of traditions. It is also gaining much relevance in modern, healthier cooking by replacing white sugar. Gur (jaggery) is made from sugarcane juice and the sap of date palm, palmyra palm and coconut palm.

In winter, gur (jaggery) based traditional sweets and snacks find their way into home kitchens. It has a warming effect on the body, and is integral to festivals.

After the rainy season, sugarcane is harvested in several parts of India. The canes are crushed to extract juice, which is boiled and concentrated to obtain gur in villages. It retains the natural goodness of sugarcane. It is rich in nutrients, antioxidants and vitamins; unlike white sugar, which has been processed with chemicals in mills. A healthier sweetener is still loaded with sucrose, so consume it in moderation.

Combine gur with seeds or cereals and you have til laddoo or gur pitha. Bake cakes and cookies; the nutty, earthy flavours of rustic gur bring you closer to nature. Jaggery-coated peanuts and dry-fruits chikkis make for a crunchy, protein-rich snack.

Maharashtra's puran poli, Tamil Nadu's sweet Pongal, Punjab's gur-ke-chawal during Baisakhi and Zarda pulao in Ramzan Eid are festive meals with gur. Ukadiche modak in Ganesh Chaturthi to Unniyappam in Onam, gur reigns supreme. Some regional specialities are southern appams, northern gur ke gulgule, eastern pua (pancakes), Goa's Nevri, Telangana's Kajjikayalu and Gujarat's sukhdi.

Some seasonal preparations like patoli, prepared in the Konkan coast, have medicinal properties. During the monsoon, gur in rice-based rolls or dumplings, wrapped in fresh turmeric leaves, is steamed.

Varieties of gur

In Bengal, winter heralds khejurer gur or nolen gur: nolen means new, prepared from fresh sap of the date palm. It is the time to indulge in traditional treats like sandesh and mishti doi. However, collecting the date palm sap is arduous. The shiulis (climbers) climb the tall palm tree with a rope tied to their body, hanging an earthen pot below an incision in the trunk, to collect the dripping sap overnight. The sap must be collected in the morning, lest it ferments. It is boiled to a thick consistency and sold in small earthen pots.

Sesame and jaggery go into the making of tilgul laddu and yellu-bella, among other sweets.

Other forms of gur, like the coconut palm gur, made from neera, the sap of coconut palm flowers, and the palmyrah palm (toddy palm) gur made from its sap, are highly nutritious.

In olden times, a visitor was welcomed with a small amount of gur and water. It is supposed to replenish electrolytes in the body and reenergize the person, especially when travelling long distances.

YELLU-BELLA TIME

Come Makara Sankranthi, and households across Karnataka prepare a mix of til, jaggery, copra and peanuts, (called yellu-bella) for distribution to loved ones. This, along with sakkare acchu or sugar candies made in moulds, is a key culinary and cultural moment during Sankranthi.

Coping with hormonal shifts

Adequate rest, compassionate care, and steering clear of stress ensure that cortisol and prolactin levels are in harmony during postpartum recovery, writes Dr Ashwini Anil Kumar Sirapanasetty

Focusing on protected healing rather than quick recovery transforms maternal health outcomes.

Childbirth does not end with delivery of the baby; in many ways, it marks the beginning of one of the most complex hormonal transitions in a woman's life. While much attention is given to physical recovery after delivery, the invisible hormonal shifts—particularly involving cortisol and prolactin—play a decisive role in postpartum healing, emotional balance, and a mother's ability to nurture her newborn. Understanding this delicate hormonal interplay is essential, not only for mothers but also for families and caregivers who often underestimate the biological intensity of the postpartum period.

MATERNAL HEALTH

Stress hormone

Cortisol is widely known as the "stress hormone." During pregnancy, cortisol levels naturally rise to support foetal development and prepare the body for labour. After delivery, these levels are expected to gradually normalise. However, in modern postpartum life — marked by sleep deprivation, emotional vulnerability, social pressure, and lack of adequate rest —cortisol often remains persistently elevated. Mothers may experience profound fatigue despite rest, anxiety, irritability, difficulty sleeping even when the baby sleeps, and delayed physical healing. Elevated cortisol also interferes with immune function, making women more susceptible to infections and prolonged inflammatory states after childbirth. Cortisol also directly affects breastfeeding. When stress dominates the postpartum environment, cortisol can suppress the hormonal pathways required for smooth lactation, leading to delayed milk let-down and reduced milk supply. This often results in unnecessary guilt and self-blame for mothers, when the root cause is physiological stress rather than maternal inadequacy.

Rest and contact with the newborn are part of a mother's healing journey.

Hormone of nurture

Released from the pituitary gland, prolactin stimulates milk production and promotes maternal behaviours such as nurturing, attachment, and emotional attunement to the baby. Its levels rise significantly with nipple stimulation, particularly during night feeds. Prolactin also has a calming effect on the maternal brain. It encourages rest, emotional sensitivity, and bonding, helping mothers adapt to their new role. In a biologically supportive environment, prolactin counterbalances stress hormones and promotes recovery. However, prolactin is highly sensitive to cortisol. Chronic stress, anxiety, fear, or pressure — common experiences for many new mothers can blunt prolactin release. This creates a vicious cycle: stress reduces milk supply, feeding difficulties increase anxiety, and cortisol rises further.

Cortisol-prolactin balance

Postpartum recovery depends not on the dominance of one hormone, but on balance. Cortisol is necessary in small amounts to help mothers stay alert and responsive to their newborn. Prolactin ensures nourishment, bonding, and emotional stability. When cortisol overwhelms prolactin, recovery becomes slower and complicated. This imbalance may contribute to postpartum mood disorders, including postpartum blues, anxiety, and depression. It may also affect uterine involution, wound healing after episiotomy or cesarean section, and overall energy levels.

Why modern mothers struggle more

Traditionally, postpartum care emphasised rest, nourishment, warmth, and emotional protection. In many cultures, new mothers were shielded from stressors and household responsibilities for weeks. Today, expectations of rapid "bounce-back," early social engagement, and minimal support disrupt this biological need for recovery. Sleep deprivation, constant external opinions, fear-based information from social media, and pressure to perform motherhood perfectly all drive cortisol upward. Unfortunately, hormonal biology does not adapt to societal expectations — it responds only to safety, rest, and support.

Recovery after childbirth

Postpartum hormonal healing is not a luxury; it is a medical and emotional necessity. Adequate rest, skin-to-skin contact, gentle breastfeeding support, nutritious meals, and emotional reassurance significantly lower cortisol and enhance prolactin release. Reducing unnecessary visitors, limiting external stressors, and validating a mother's emotional experiences are equally important. Medical professionals must recognise that postpartum symptoms are often hormonal signals rather than weakness or poor coping. When extreme anxiety, persistent sadness, severe sleep disturbance, or breastfeeding difficulties persist, timely medical evaluation is crucial. Early support can prevent long-term complications for both mother and child.

Postpartum recovery is a hormonally sensitive phase that deserves respect, patience, and structured support. Shifting the narrative from "quick recovery" to "protected healing" can transform maternal health outcomes.

(The author is an obstetrics and gynaecology surgeon, and senior counsellor of Army Wives Welfare Association.)

Pelvic health guide for Gen Z women

DR MANJULA ANAGANI

Walk into any gynaecology clinic today and you'll see something that barely existed a decade ago: women in their early twenties describing deep, dull pelvic aches, sharp twinges during movement, or a heavy, dragging sensation by evening. Young women who have never had a baby and often have no underlying disease on their scans are now showing up with pain.

Lifestyle shift

A shift in lifestyle, stress patterns, and daily habits has made pelvic floor tightness a growing concern for Gen Z. The 'always-on' lifestyle is hard on pelvic muscles. Pelvic floors aren't passive structures. They respond to the body's emotional state. When you spend long hours in a heightened, anxious alertness — juggling academics, work, social pressure, or the constant hum of digital life — the pelvic floor often tightens just like the jaw or shoulders do.

Chronic anxiety doesn't stay in the mind; it has a muscular signature. For many young women, this constant low-level tension settles in the pelvis. Over time, these muscles forget how to relax, leading to pain during periods, discomfort while sitting, or pain during intimacy.

- Slouching pushes the tailbone forward, compressing the pelvic outlet.
- Crossing legs for long hours shifts weight to one side, overstretching some muscles while shortening others.
- Leaning over screens rounds the lower spine, forcing the pelvic floor to take on extra support work.
- Movement isn't optional; even a short break every hour — standing, stretching, or walking around your room — helps muscles reset.
- Most youngsters know posture can trigger back or neck pain, but few realise the pelvis is part of the same chain.

Impact of poor posture

- A dull heaviness during periods
- Pain with deep penetration
- A strange, internal pressure when standing too long
- Discomfort while using tampons or menstrual cups

High-intensity workouts, heavy lifting, and core-focused routines have become a big part of Gen Z fitness culture. Overdoing abdominal workouts, bracing the core constantly, not stretching after training impact pelvic health.

(The author is a Padma Shri awardee, clinical director, robotic gynaecologist & HOD at a Hyderabad hospital.)

TREATMENT

- Pelvic floor physiotherapy
- Posture correction
- Breathwork that teaches the diaphragm and pelvis to work together
- Stretching and mobility routines
- Addressing anxiety patterns

Constant anxiety and mental load can also lead to pelvic pain.

Air pollution is quietly corroding India's historic monuments, exposing gaps in pollution control policies and their on-ground implementation, writes Shilpa Raina

A silent assault on HERITAGE

Air pollution is the silent enemy of a monument like the iconic Red Fort.

The implications of air pollution on health, education and work productivity dominate headlines every winter, when air quality deteriorates to hazardous levels across northern India. New research now shows that these pollutants are also slowly corroding the symbols of India's past, placing the country's cultural heritage at risk.

A scientific study on the Red Fort has found that chemical interactions between air pollutants and the monument's stone surface are destroying its distinctive red façade, gradually turning it black.

The findings echo earlier concerns about pollution-induced damage to historic monuments. Decades ago, pollution was identified as the cause behind the Taj Mahal's changing appearance. Despite protective measures, the "wonder of the world" continues to make headlines for foul odours and marble surfaces turning green.

The Red Fort has long been a political symbol, serving as the backdrop for every Prime Minister's Independence Day speech since 1947. Yet political will has fallen short in protecting it — and hundreds of other monuments — from the effects of air pollution. The Red Fort study is the first to link the formation of black crusts on its surface directly to emissions from cement factories, thermal power plants and vehicles.

"Indian monuments are already losing their settings because of rampant encroachment and unauthorised construction. It's sad to see policymakers believe there is a Planet B. Otherwise, there would have been concrete measures to reduce air pollution," says Abha Narain Lambah, a UNESCO award-winning conservation architect.

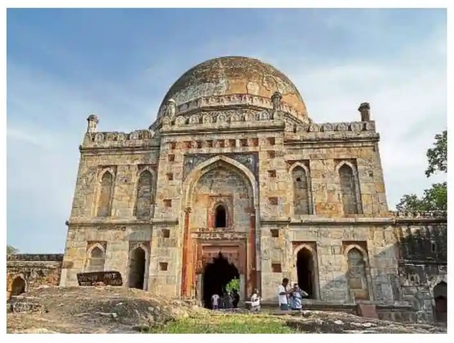
Not all is lost, however. Researchers say early interventions can prevent or slow airborne damage to heritage buildings.

A cocktail of chemical reactions

Many of the world's ancient monuments are built from limestone and marble, materials favoured for their availability, durability and ease of extraction. Historic Mughal structures in Delhi — including the Red Fort, Qutub Minar and Humayun's Tomb — use Vindhyan sandstone and Makrana marble.

These materials now face unprecedented stress amid rapid industrialisation. High levels of particulate matter and atmospheric nitrogen dioxide from traffic and industrial emissions have triggered a sulfation process on the Red Fort's sandstone surface. This leads to the formation of a thin gypsum layer (calcium sulphate), which gradually develops into black crusts that trap dust and other pollutants, the study found. Beyond visible damage, erosion reduces the cultural and aesthetic value of heritage sites.

POT POURRI



Tomb from the Lodhi dynasty in Delhi. Most monuments were made of limestone and marble, materials now facing a test of endurance. PIC: SUJOY DHAR

Taj Trapezium Zone, a defined area around the monument, was set up in 1996 to protect it from pollution. (Sylwia Bartyzel/Unsplash)

Early restoration efforts can mitigate this damage. "We always begin conservation using non-abrasive methods that don't harm the stone," Lambah explains. "Gentle water misting under controlled pressure, or techniques like multani mitti or paper poultices, are used. Chemical peeling is applied only when grime accumulation persists, and always under supervision." Sanjay Kumar Manjul, Additional Director General at the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and an author of the study, says restoration has already begun at the Red Fort. "Every product contains chemical compounds. What matters is dosage — how much is used and how it reacts with the surface. Even something as safe as multani mitti has mineral components," he says.

Protecting the Taj

For M C Mehta, the lawyer behind the landmark case to protect the Taj Mahal, restoration alone is insufficient without controlling emissions. "Even after 40 years since my case highlighted pollution-driven deterioration, and several hearings later, little has changed," he says. His petition led to the creation of the Taj Trapezium Zone (TTZ) in 1996.

The TTZ restricts coal- and coke-based industries within a 10,400-square-kilometre area covering parts of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. The aim was to limit the Taj's exposure by relocating industries beyond the zone.

The TTZ Authority includes district magistrates, pollution control boards, ASI representatives and state ministries. It has powers to enforce fuel standards and halt utilities from polluting units. Monthly district-level meetings and quarterly reviews are mandated. Yet pollution persists. A recent RTI revealed that high suspended particulate matter levels have continued to yellow the Taj's marble for nearly two decades.

"A major challenge is rapid development around the Taj," says Amit Mishra, Regional Officer at the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board. "PM2.5 levels have risen sharply due to vehicular emissions. While Agra Metro construction aims to reduce traffic, it has also increased dust." In May, the National Green Tribunal flagged poor implementation of pollution-control measures in Agra, noting that initiatives like tree planting and electric buses remained largely on paper.

Controlling rising vehicular emissions

Vehicular emissions pose a growing threat in Delhi, where over 700,000 new cars were registered in 2024. SUVs, among the most polluting vehicle types, have become increasingly popular. Exhaust fumes deposit heavy metals — including lead, titanium and nickel — onto the black crusts forming on the Red Fort.

Sohail Hashmi, historian and heritage walk leader, emphasises public participation. "If we value our heritage, both government and citizens must act together. Affordable public transport and willingness to carpool are crucial," he says. "Unless we know where we come from, how do we decide where we're going? Without understanding our architectural tradition, evolved over thousands of years, how do we connect our present with our past?" Hashmi asks.

MONGABAY INDIA/TWF

MELODY MAKERS

When ragas met revolt on the Ghats

For AGAM, Karnatik progressive rock is less a fusion and more an evolving conversation driven by introspection, discovers Neha Kirpal

The innovative compositions of India's pioneering Karnatik progressive rock band, AGAM, resonate deeply with Kabir's spirit of rebellion, introspection, and unity. Their electrifying finale at the recently concluded ninth edition of the Mahindra Kabira Festival in Varanasi was thus a befitting conclusion to the festival held annually at the ghats of what some believe is the world's oldest city.

"Varanasi brings a certain stillness and intensity, and our set reflected that," said Harish Sivaramakrishnan, a trained Karnatik vocalist with over 30 years of classical music experience. The band performed original compositions that lean into themes of introspection, devotion, and questioning — ideas that resonate deeply with Kabir's philosophy.

The Bengaluru-based band's journey began in 2003 with a group of college musicians who shared a deep passion for progressive rock and Indian classical music. "It really is a coming together of very different musical journeys. Some of us are classically trained, some come from rock and jazz, and others are deeply rooted in rhythm. Everyone listens closely to each other, especially on stage. Over time, that trust has become our biggest strength. The band works because our concerts always feel like a dialogue with the audience," explained Aditya Kasyap.

On how they manage to fuse Karnatik classical and progressive rock music, the band believes it is something that happens instinctively. "We don't really sit down and say, 'Let's fuse these two styles.' Karnatik music is where our melodic thinking comes from — it teaches you patience, depth, and emotion. Progressive rock, on the other hand, gives us the freedom to play with form, sound, and scale. When we write, the raga and the mood come first. The guitars, synths, and rhythms then grow around that. The idea is to let both speak honestly in the same space," elaborated Sivaramakrishnan.

Over the years, the band has released a number of albums, each marking a different phase of where they were as people and musicians. After winning Ooh La La La, a music reality show hosted by Sun TV in 2007, AGAM released their debut album, The Inner Self Awakens (2012), creating Karnatik progressive rock as a genre and a self-defining sound. This was followed by their studio album, A Dream to Remember (2017), which was more emotional and narrative-driven, incorporating a strong element of storytelling. Their latest album, Arrival of the Ethereal (2025), is more reflective and atmospheric, and even led to a Grammy consideration. With this album, they also came to be known to a new generation as the "Pied Pipers of Karnatik music."

> Musically, we're exploring newer textures and rhythms while staying rooted in melody. There's a lot of space in this music. We're not in a rush to finish it; we want it to feel honest. It's shaping up to be a very immersive listening experience.

As a band, their musical influences are varied and diverse. "From Karnatik music, we've grown up listening to songs from the Trinity. From the rock and progressive side, bands like Pink Floyd, Porcupine Tree, Dream Theatre, Tool, and Opeth have influenced how we think about structure and mood," said Kasyap. Their new album, though still evolving, is thematically about transition and movement — both internal and external. "Musically, we're exploring newer textures and rhythms while staying rooted in melody. There's a lot of space in this music. We're not in a rush to finish it; we want it to feel honest. It's shaping up to be a very immersive listening experience," added Sivaramakrishnan.

The year 2026 promises to be busy and exciting for the band. They are working on new compositions and exploring collaborations with artists from different traditions, including folk and classical spaces. Further, concerts and festival appearances are planned in India and abroad. "For us, it's important that every project is meaningful. AGAM has always been about the long journey, and we want to keep it that way," concluded Kasyap.

Band members of AGAM.

PAWS & LIFE

Life lessons and little wisdoms from a beloved pet

A dog adds chaos aplenty, but there's also companionship, unconditional love, and unending joy in those tail wags, writes Nalini Sorensen

When we married, over 22 years ago, my husband joked that we needed to get a fish, a parrot, a cat, a dog — in this order — and, only if all survived my caregiving, would we then consider having a baby.

Things didn't go to plan. We had the baby, well, two of them — our sons are two years apart — first. While surrounded by sleepless nights, diapers and sippy cups, in came a tank full of fish, soon followed by a cat. But a cat and fish? This was not how nature intended things to be. The cat spent hours watching the fish leisurely swim around contentedly. He scratched the tank enough to leave marks on the glass and make his intentions clear. Eventually, we decided not to replenish the fish once they went through their life journey. And the cat? That silly boy decided to eat a lizard! So, we were pet-free but son-full in our home.

As young parents, very naïve in the whole parenting gig, we'd promised our sons we'd get a dog when they were 10 and 12 years old. We thought that was so far away. But, as these things go, that came round fast. Suddenly, they were 10 and 12, and we were constantly barraged with, "But you said we could get one when we were 10 and 12. We are!"

We had to make good. That's how Sydney Sorensen came into our lives. It turned out to be the best decision we ever made. A dog adds chaos aplenty —there's barking, muddy footprints on the bed, and fur balls flying poetically around like cotton clouds. But there's also companionship, unconditional love, and unending joy in those tail wags.

Being a pet parent adds to the plate in terms of the work you need to do for the pet, but you receive far more than you give. It's one of the healthiest equations any relationship can offer. More than what we receive, it's the unexpected life lessons that we learn from our fur babies that make the whole journey so worth it.

If you've noticed a dog, you've probably seen that they aren't really sad for long.

If you've noticed a dog, you've probably seen that they aren't really sad for long. They bounce back fast. If you reprimand a dog, he doesn't lie around sulking. A hat tip to resilience if there ever was one. A dog bounds back quickly, demonstrating emotional recovery. They keep the lesson and move on with their lives. I've learnt to mirror this from my Sydney.

There is no bigger reminder to me to be present and live in the moment than watching Sydney go about her day. I've started training myself to find joy in the ordinary, in the everyday, from noticing how so little brings her such great joy — a treat, the breeze on her face, a smile or pat from a stranger. It's the small stuff, the ordinary, that puts a spring in her step. She's taught me that life is too short to only find joy in the extraordinary.

One of the biggest lessons I've learnt from Sydney is the belief, well, almost expectation, that people love you. Sydney never meets a stranger, human or canine, with anything other than the surety that they will love her. This genuineness of feeling and emotion often translates into people instantly taking to her. I try to remember this every time I walk into a room full of strangers —they will love me; what's there not to love?

Dogs teach us that life is too short to only find joy in the extraordinary.

Another unexpected lesson I learnt was patience. This has never been a strength. Toilet training our Sydney, the puppy chewing phase, the destuffing of toys phase, the learning how-to-bathe-her phase — every one of these taught me patience in truckloads. To breathe calmly through it; to believe that this too shall pass.

Sydney has not just become a sibling to my sons, but has anchored our home. The sound of her paws clicking on the floor as she follows me from room to room reassures me that I'm never alone; it teaches me dependability, gives me comfort and security. In loving her, I've realised that while we think we're raising dogs, it's often they who end up raising us.

The writer is an award-winning children's author who loves dogs, children, and books — the order changes daily. Write to her at nalinisorensen@gmail.com

Paws & Life *is a new monthly column that reflects on how our pets shape the way we live, love, and learn.*

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